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Minnie Vosburgh
From her S. S. Teacher
Christmas 1884.

NELLY KINNARD'S KINGDOM.

BY

AMANDA M. DOUGLAS,

AUTHOR OF "SEVEN DAUGHTERS," "HOME NOOK," &c.

BOSTON:

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DEDICATED

TO

MR. AND MRS. GEORGE G. HARDY.

THEY WHO CLASP HANDS IN PILGRIM WISE,
AND FIND BENEATH THE CLASP A FRIEND,
NEED ASK OF FATE NO FAIRER PRIZE,
TO BLESS THE WAY, OR CROWN THE END.

WOODSIDE, 1876.

NELLY KINNARD'S KINGDOM.

CHAPTER I.

**"A strange, sweet path formed day by day,
How, when, or wherefore, we cannot say:
No more than of our life-paths we know
Whither they lead us, why we go." — MISS MULOCH.**

"It is all settled then, Nelly? You are certain that papa and mamma approve?"

I suppose I did look at her dubiously. Nelly glanced up merrily, and smiled.

"Of course, it is all settled, or I should not be here. Much as I liked him, I shouldn't have gone against mamma's wishes."

"It seems so strange!"

"You dear, little perplexed matron! Are not love-affairs always new and strange? I think that is why they never lose their charm. It is like a new spring. The weather is about the same; trees grow, and flowers bloom; there is rain and sun, cloudy and clear mornings, evenings of dew, and evenings of drought: and yet one never complains of the sameness. There is a little difference everywhere. You are surprised by some change that is rare and delightful; and you enjoy it just as if there had never been a spring before, or as if it had been changed expressly for you."

"How eloquent you are, Nelly! — quite a philosopher."

She flushed, and laughed gayly.

"I have an idea, Rose, that my eloquence is second-hand, from some of papa's sermons; and yet it suits. Your marriage and Fan's were quite regular and orthodox; while mine will be a little out of the order of events. Dr. Kinnard is so much older, so different from most young girl's fancies!"

"O Nelly!" I cried, as her eyes drooped in a thoughtful pause, "it is not that so much as the children, — another woman's children! I used to think babies such lovely, helpless things, that one must perforce be good to all children; but these are not babies, and will, no doubt, have a prejudice against a stepmother. And there are others to suit. It seems as if it would take the first bloom and sacredness right out of your marriage."

"Yes: mamma said something like this at first. Then Dr. Kinnard and I talked it over in a very friendly manner, — not at all like lovers. Rose, I think I am like an agate, with plain brown practical veins, and next a light, airy, changeful one, romantic, if you please; and I go from one mood to another in a prismatic fashion, affected by the rays of light and the turning of circumstances. But the foundation always remains; and there is something under the practical, the fanciful, and the jagged, streaked veins, full of crooks and turns. My plain brown side came uppermost then. I said to him, 'I do not think it at all natural that any stranger can go into a household of children and grown people, and love every one to order at once. I will do my best in a kind and conscientious manner; but you must be patient with me, and wait for love to come, to be drawn by the little tendrils of association and every-day tenderness. I could not promise to love any one immediately.' And he said that was just his view of the case; that he always mistrusted the extravagant admiration that was so often bestowed upon a widower's children. And, Rose, I think it absurd."

I stared at her,—a tall, slender girl, with quite a different loveliness from that of Fan, who had been considered the family beauty in *my* time, four years ago. How odd it seemed to think of her marrying! and how very elder-sisterly I felt with my years of wedded experience! Yet what had they been? A housekeeper who was perfection, a most indulgent husband, prosperity, and one bright, enchanting baby-boy, two years old. Still I had that inexplicable feeling of wifeness and motherhood, that, after all, sets married women apart. Yet Nelly's experience must needs be widely different from Fan's or mine. How could I advise or warn? I felt suddenly the smallness of my pretensions.

"I daresay you think me heterodox," Nelly went on; "but there is a great deal of sentiment in this world that will not stand the wear and tear of life. Mamma understands just what I mean, and is willing to trust me. I have said to myself many times, 'Here are two children, a son and a daughter, old enough to know that I am not their mother, and perhaps grudge me a little of their father's love. I must always remember that they had it first, and that, in any case, I must try not to defraud them.'"

"And that is what I should think so hard," I rejoined eagerly. "And the fact of his having loved"—

"Rose,"—and Nelly's eyes softened strangely with a luminous beauty, so like papa's when he was deeply moved,— "I do not believe it was the highest and finest love that Dr. Kinnard is capable of experiencing. He became engaged to this girl when he was in college, partly to please his mother, and, I fancy, without much regard for the sacredness of affection. Then he spent three years in Germany, where he absolutely buried himself alive in books and lectures, and was married as soon as he came home. It seems to me they could hardly have had a taste in common. He loved country-life, and she

hated it. She had been a belle, and cared most for dressing and dancing, and always spent her winters in the city, until she became a querulous, exacting invalid; and then her sister came to take care of her. I cannot imagine why she wanted to marry him, when there were other men in the world, I suppose."

"She couldn't help being sick," I said, bristling up a little; for somehow the thought of such a life stirred me to profound pity.

"No, dear, perhaps not. And one of the first things I heard of Dr. Kinnard was, that he had been unexceptionably kind and tender. It is not his nature to be impatient, or easily annoyed. I like that quaint old-fashionedness, reminding me so much of papa; and, do you know, he seems almost as old to me. But what I mean to do, if God gives me grace, is to bring back the lost youth,—the youth he missed somehow. Surely I have enough for both."

She looked so radiant and hopeful, that I could not doubt it. We had all marvelled a little at Nelly's choice. Dr. Kinnard appeared an older man than his thirty-five years gave him a right to be. Studious and philosophical, rather dreamy, and absent as to moods, and much engrossed with his profession, I could hardly understand how he had caught Nelly's heart. He and papa had made friends in some delightful manner; and he had been a regular visitor at the house long before any one suspected him of a warmer liking. He resided on the outskirts of a flourishing town some twenty miles distant; and papa was quite satisfied with the friendly neighborhood commendations. Mrs. Kinnard had been dead five years. Her sister, who had come at the birth of her second child, still remained; and for three years his mother had been an inmate of the family. There was a daughter eleven years of age, and a son between eight and nine.

And our Nelly had elected to reign over this incon-

gruous household. She had spent one winter in the city with me, and been very much admired: indeed, there had been no little youthful adoration laid at her feet. She had a vein of Fan's fun and audacity, and not a little of mother's good sense and sweetness.

All the household were reconciled to it sooner than I, perhaps because they knew Dr. Kinnard better. Nelly was twenty now; and, though the engagement had been of but six months' duration, the wedding-day was already appointed. She was not a romantic girl; and this made her choice appear the more peculiar to me.

"Well, I hope you will be very happy," I said presently, "and that the children will not prove too much for you. If you could have them alone"—

"That has troubled me, I must confess;" and a perplexed line crossed Nelly's fair brow. "If I *could* have just them and their father! though, Rose, I must admit that they are not entrancing specimens of childhood. Maud is tall for her age, slender and sallow, with straight light brown hair, and light hazel eyes, and the oddest, pursed-up mouth,—what we would call a regular little prink. Bertie has beautiful dark brown eyes, like his father, and dark hair that curls a little; but there is a kind of obstinacy in his face that I dread somewhat, though he is more inclined to be jolly, I think. But you see their aunt has always had charge of them, and proposes now to become their governess, as she has some peculiar views about education. She is their only relative on their mother's side."

"And, of course, she must live with you?"

"I must live with her;" and Nelly made a humorous grimace. "She was older than her sister, and must be nearly forty. Then the doctor's mother is past sixty. Rose, do you remember how we used to wish that we had a grandmother?"

Oh, that grandmother! How we had talked about her

in our childish days! — the very dearest old woman in the world, rather small, but straight and brisk and bright; with a lovely, soft, wrinkled complexion, white as milk; blue eyes that were tender and merry, and with the peculiar content you sometimes see in eyes that have used their time and privileges well, as if they had seen much, and remembered a great deal, and could relate chapters of those wonderful bits and fragments of things that happened “when I was young.” Her hair was to be silvery, and she was to wear caps with full lace borders around her sweet face. Her dresses were to be soft grays and browns, raw silk, I think the Quaker material is called. Mamma had a little square shawl in the identical stuff, laid away in a drawer, which had once been *her* grandmother's. How many pictures we drew of this dear, charming old lady, sitting in her rocking-chair, knitting, and telling us stories! Only we could never quite decide whether she was papa's mother, or mamma's mother. I smiled now to think of it.

“And how we envied other girls' grandmothers! But we made ours to order; and I shall have to take Grandma Kinnard just as she is.”

“Do you think you shall like her?” I asked rather timidly, glancing up.

“She sets all my ideas at defiance,” returned Nelly with an odd smile. “Her eyes are very black, and her face is long and thin. She wears no caps, or aprons, or little neckerchiefs crossed over her bosom, but ruffles and overskirts and chignons, and is very, very modern. O Rose! when we grow old, let us accept the fact gracefully. You can't think how disappointed I was when I saw her.”

“Nelly, I wonder at your courage. It is not a lovable household. You cannot even deceive yourself on the subject.”

“Nor do I desire to, Rose. Mamma says the part of true wisdom is to look at facts as they are, and then do

the best. Fanny had no trouble; yet she went into a household of elderly people."

"But they all liked her so beforehand, and wanted her to come. And the Churchills were lovely people."

"It seems to me that more attention ought to be paid to the relatives on both sides than is commonly done. Why should we make up our minds that we are going to dislike each other, and, instead of commencing with the graceful and tender courtesies of life, bristle all over with thorns, and command every one to keep at a distance? There is not even Christian charity in it."

"We cannot always love people to order, as you said yourself."

"True enough. I do not expect any wonderful welcome. Indeed, I fancy that both ladies would rather go on in their own way; but, after having fulfilled all past trusts, Dr. Kinnard surely has some right to happiness. Neither of these women is dependent on him. And—we love each other! I know you think it absurd of me, Rose," she cries in a sort of defiant way, as if it would hardly be safe for me to say so.

"I suppose you have the right of choice;" and I smile.

"Thank you!" With that she makes a stately courtesy.

"How they will miss you at home!" I say presently.

"But there are four left; and Daisy is almost eighteen. Think of it! O Rose, what a dear old home it has been for all! A crowded country rectory, a clergyman 'passing rich' on his thousand a year, and seven girls! But with it all, the best and sweetest mother in the whole world. It does seem ungrateful to go away; but it is the fashion of this world."

The tears glistened in her eyes a moment; but she laughed them away.

"To think of being sentimental over your parents

instead of your lover! But, Rose, I must be up and doing. Since, like Benedick, I do purpose marriage, I will think of nothing the world can say against it. When are we to shop? For there is only a month, you know."

As I was in the city, right in the midst of every thing, with Mrs. Whitcomb for my "right-hand man," Nelly had come to me to help her plan and arrange her bridal outfit.

When Fanny and I (the two elder daughters) were married, there had been very plain and inexpensive *trousseaus*. As papa said with his fine discrimination, we were married from our station, not from our lovers'. Since that period, however, matters had gone on quite prosperously in the old home-nest.

Fan had married into one of the oldest and wealthiest families in Wachusett. Her husband's uncle and aunt had adopted them. Winthrop Ogden had come home to live, and was already looked upon as a young man who would make his mark. He was connected with the bank, and was taking a warm interest in local politics; and some of the steady-going old men predicted a brilliant future for him.

Mrs. Ogden was quite a lady, and rode in her carriage, had a nurse for her children, and numerous indulgences of which her mother had never dreamed. More than one of the belles in town who thought themselves quite above her then, envied her now. But prosperity agreed with her. She was the same bright, joyous, warm-hearted Fan who had brightened the quaint old rectory.

So, when this third marriage was settled, she one day slipped a crisp little roll in Nelly's hand.

"That is for some wedding-finery, my dear," she said gayly. "I told Winthrop that he might do the ornamental part, silver and gold, and all that, but that I should be strictly useful."

Papa and mamma had made their additions; and

Stephen had said to me privately, the evening before, that he wanted to give Nelly a pretty silk dress of a soft, exquisite shade that he had seen in a store.

I fancy that we all took a greater pride in Nelly's "looking nice," because the first Mrs. Kinnard had been quite an heiress; and her sister, Miss Grove, would still be there to inspect and comment upon Nelly's belongings. We had grown quite worldly-wise, you see.

The doctor had a good comfortable income from his practice, owned his house and several acres of ground. Mrs. Kinnard had some money of her own. The mother's fortune was to be divided equally between her children, though she had spent quite a large portion of it. Miss Grove had been of a much more economical turn of mind, it was said.

I did wonder what Nelly saw in that grave, absent man to love so well, when she might have had youth and its accompaniments. He was not rich enough for that to be a temptation. But he was very fond of her in a fatherly fashion; and there was something quite touching in the watchful, wistful look out of the entreating brown eyes. Yet he was rather peculiar and set in his ways.

Mrs. Whitcomb came in with baby at this juncture. I had hardly been allowed to miss mamma in her tender love and sympathy. She had taken the real care of my house; and she had been such a good friend to Stephen and the boys! Indeed, every one who came in contact with her could not fail of being indebted for some love or kindness. She gave so continually. Sister of Mercy, husband first called her; then Louis changed it to Sister Clare. Now and then she took a vacation, and spent a month with mamma, or with the Churchills, who had learned to love her.

"O Stevie!" cried Nelly, holding out her hands, and kissing him rapturously. "Do you ever realize how beautiful he is, Rose? He is like a picture, or a dream. I am afraid of him, and yet he enchants me."

"But mamma is not afraid of him;" and I took him in my arms. Ah, I did know that he was rarely beautiful. Two years old, fair, strong, and princely looking, running about by himself, talking every thing, and making such quaint, wise remarks, that I sometimes felt startled, and, at others laughed at their oddness. As I recall them now, I think of that other mother of whom it was said, "A sword shall pierce even through thine own soul." But in those days I was perfectly happy. How good it is even to have had a few golden years!

We fondled and made much of him, as foolish mothers and aunts do. It is a great comfort that Providence has provided some outlet for yearning, demonstrative affection. If there were no babies, we should be perched forever on the high stilts of propriety and good sense.

Here we called Mrs. Whitcomb into council, and discussed wedding-clothes.

"It is so odd to think of another girl going out of the home-nest!" she said, studying Nelly with a kind of motherly pride. "Why, it is only the other day Rose and Fan were married."

"And thought ourselves grand over one light silk dress; while Nelly here is planning for half a dozen. But I am not jealous, Nell."

"If you were, I should report you to Stephen," says Nelly merrily.

We kiss baby again and again, make him say and do hosts of pretty things, then sally out to attack dry-goods' stores. It is a clear, cold March morning, or almost noon rather. Nelly is bright and gleeful; but I keep thinking of the grave man and his two children, his mother, and sister-in-law, and wonder if her sunshine will not fail when the glamour of courtship wears off. Does it wear off? Has Stephen's and mine vanished? Ah, no, no! Why, then, can I not trust Nelly's to endure?

Ah, mine has really never been tried! Stephen so good

and tender; the boys, his two brothers, doing well, for all their troublesome boyhood; Louis, having taken a degree with honors, is now studying theology; Stuart, bright and handsome, is in a flourishing mercantile house, and, though somewhat wild and careless, displays energy enough to make a fortune. Nothing to fret, or cross, or to depress. Why, it almost seems as if I was defrauding some other human being by having so much!

There will be thorns in Nelly's path from the outset. I know she will do her best; and she is no weak, easily disheartened girl. If Dr. Kinnard loves her truly, and is not won merely by the fair face and beguiling manner; if he possesses the rare attribute of justice, and remembers that she is a woman, and not a plaything, or a higher order of slave, to minister to one's personal comfort only; if—

Then I come back to the silks and laces, the pretty soft woollen cloths the clerk drapes so deftly, the glistening grenadines and June-day organdies, all abloom with loveliness; for it will be almost summer when she is married. She smiles with the seductive grace of youth, chooses this, rejects that, talks of carriage-dresses, dinner-toilets, colors that show by lamplight, until I wonder where she has gained her wisdom. Nelly Endicott from a simple country rectory! Yet the clerk looks at her in respectful admiration, as if she might be a princess in disguise.

We come home late and tired, and find that some of the bundles have preceded us. Stephen brings out his package, and begs Nelly to inspect it without delay. Under the gaslight, it falls in folds of glistening sheen, something that is hardly pearl, hardly gray, but moonlight, sunlight, and starlight interfused,—a regular bride's color.

“O you magnificent Stephen!” she cries. “How could you?” And then she straightways throws her arms

about his neck, and kisses him. A son and a brother he is truly to all the Endicott household.

After dinner Louis comes in the sitting room to help criticise and admire. He is taller than Stephen, but still slender, and with a kind of fragile look that occasionally pains me. These four years have been years of great watchfulness to him. Trials and failures have marked the way; doubts, perplexities, and discouragements have beset him: yet there has been a steady upward endeavor. He, of all others, must needs be strong in the Lord; for he finds his own strength too often but a broken reed. But I think it will enable him the more clearly to comprehend the infirmities of others, and work in him a patience much needed by those who do the Master's bidding.

Singularly enough, without knowing it, he gives the preference to Stephen's gift, though they are all beautiful in their way, adapted to the purpose.

"Why, I shall be clad like a princess!" Nelly cries,—"almost in 'silken shoon.' I shall grow vain with so many fine clothes."

"Like Rose, here," says Stephen.

"Vain!—I?" and my cheeks are scarlet, at which everybody laughs.

"If she were not going to marry Dr. Kinnard," I say to Stephen when we are alone for the night.

He looks up oddly and archly. "Why shouldn't one of you girls go out as a missionary?" he asks. "Does not Dr. Kinnard need a bright, cheerful home, and a pretty, loving wife? What is more, I think he deserves it, after all these unsatisfactory years."

"But if Nelly should find out too late"—

"Perhaps there is not any river, and no need of a bridge: so why do you want to run out, and see if Nelly *could* cross it?" and he laughs. "I should like her to have her home alone; but she is taking the broad Christian view of it. The spiritually lame and halt and blind need

to be ministered unto as much now as eighteen hundred years ago. Have we a right to push them out one side from a selfish regard for our own comfort? Nelly is a brave girl. If my mother had been alive, Rose" —

"Oh, she would have been so different!"

"We cannot tell. Old age is not always lovely. I like to think that you would have been kind and sweet and patient with the whims and crotchets of ill health and failing judgment. It seems so sad to me to see an old person who has lost most of the friends and companions of middle life, who has known sorrow and trials, and is living in a kind of loneliness that youth can know nothing about, pushed aside with careless coldness, because this same overflowing youth is not willing to give out of its abundance."

"O Stephen! do not think that hardly of me," I cried earnestly.

"It is not a thought of you, little woman. Nay, do not look so grave, but rather help, than hinder, Nelly in her new duties. Some one has the hard work to do in this world. I am just selfish enough to be glad that it is not you; but I believe you are brave enough to do it."

"Thank you," I said humbly, with tears in my eyes.

Mrs. Whitcomb and I had found a treasure of a dress-maker, — a poor young girl who taught Sundays in the mission-school; and she was to give us a fortnight on Nelly's attire. We were very busy, you may be sure. We all helped; and we "rectory girls" were almost dressmakers ourselves. Then there were some fine concerts just at this time, and some lectures that Stephen wanted us to hear; and the days passed rapidly. Dr. Kinnard kept his love in remembrance by frequent letters, and came for her when she was ready to return.

I began to understand better Nelly's sterling good sense, and the solemnity with which she had already con-

aided her life-work. Her love was not a simple, girlish fancy, caught by something a little out of the ordinary course. I began to fear less for her, and leave her more to the care of the watchful Father, who has promised that all things shall work together for good.

CHAPTER II.

**"For it may be proclaimed with truth,
If Bruce hath loved sincerely,
That Gordon loves as dearly." — WORDSWORTH.**

THE marriage took place the middle of May, in church, with Nelly dressed in the simplest of white, at papa's request. The Kinnard household had all been invited; but only the two ladies came, their silks almost as stiff as their manners. They brought with them a different atmosphere, not the cordiality of our circle, nor the high breeding of the West Side, but the bristling-up of little boundary lines, lest some one might be inclined to trespass upon his neighbor's lawn.

"I did not consider it a proper thing to bring the children," Miss Grove explained to mamma. "They are too young to understand such a ceremony; and it would always be a puzzle to them."

Whether Dr. Kinnard cared, no one knew; for he made no comment. He looked unusually well, I thought, and so happy, that the last vestige of my reluctance vanished. A little graver than our double marriage; for that had the flush and exuberance of kindred youth and consenting friendship.

We came home to an elegant little reception at the rectory. Fan had supervised that, with Daisy and Lily for handmaidens, who were growing up in the same sisterly companionship that had characterized Fan and I.

Nelly had but an hour's grace, and then they were to start for Washington. Mamma was fresh and lovely:

indeed, it seemed quite absurd to think of her being a grandmother. Papa had gained a little flesh; and I was really elated to see how he held his own with Mrs. Kinnard, who took the marriage none too cordially, and hoped it was for the best, in the tone of a person who would not be heartbroken at seeing a little of the worst happen.

"The traditional mother-in-law," said Winthrop Ogden with a queer little smile. "I think she will have hard work to extinguish Nelly."

Mamma shook her head at him.

"And, Fan, if you think you would like to exchange Aunt Esther for Miss Grove" —

"You incorrigible!" whispered Fan with a pinch. "It is against good breeding and religion to gossip about your neighbors."

"I am not gossiping, Mrs. Ogden. If I knew twenty stories to their detriment, I positively wouldn't tell more than ten. Rose, look at those two women: Miss Grove is the old maid in every severe and proper line; while Aunt Essie, her senior certainly, is the very picture of a noble and lovable woman. What makes so wide a difference?"

"It is in the women themselves," I replied. "One has narrowed her life: the other has broadened it. One has made herself lovely through generous feelings, and deeds of charity and tenderness; and the other — no, I will not talk about my neighbors either;" and I ended with a little laugh.

There was a stir just then. Nelly and the doctor were saying their good-bys; Winthrop and papa were going to drive to the station with them; and the Kinnards' train was to start half an hour later. Mamma pressed them to remain until the next train; but Miss Grove explained that they seldom went out together, and left the children alone, and that, under the circumstances, they would

excuse her feelings. Nothing but her high regard for Dr. Kinnard could have induced her to come; "for my poor sister is still a reality to me. In time I shall no doubt become accustomed to seeing her place filled;" and Miss Grove sighed.

I wondered how mamma could answer her with such wisdom and such sweetness. I should have stumbled with the very best intentions. And yet I felt sorry for the poor lady; and, for a moment, it seemed as if Nelly had no right, — that she was an intruder.

I suppose the vexed question of second marriages never can be settled to every one's satisfaction. Whether they are wise, whether they are necessary, is a question that no one can resolve, except the parties thereto. It was the first little shade that had come in to jar our family harmony.

We bade the ladies a cordial farewell; but it must be confessed that we felt more at ease after they were gone. In fact, when some of the poor parishioners who had been invited by papa began to come in, there was a sudden jollity.

How pleasant it was to be among old friends and neighbors! I had only made brief visits at home since baby's birth; but now I had come for a good long stay. For this afternoon and evening I was a daughter of the house; and one or two old ladies actually called me Rose Endicott.

Yet I felt a little bewildered, trying to fit myself into the niche out of which I had grown. Was this tall, shy girl, baby Edith, whose advent had made a stir in the parish, and led to such ever-widening circles? I remembered the morning Aunt Letty Perkins had sat before the fire, bewailing another girl; and I had wondered if papa were not secretly sorry to have so many of us. He looked uncommonly joyous now, jsting with one and another, and talking about his sons. Why, it was absurd.

to "father" such a man as Dr. Kinnard: Stephen and Winthrop did very well.

About midnight, I think, we settled into quiet. The next morning Stephen and Mrs. Whitcomb returned to the city. Mamma still kept but one girl: indeed, now there seemed very little to do; and Daisy was a born housekeeper. Beauty seemed to descend alternately. Daisy had a sweet, good, honest face; but she would never be as handsome as Fan or Nelly. Lily and Gertrude took their share of the household work; and there was no baby. Mamma sat a good deal in the study with some trifle of sewing while papa wrote, or read aloud to him when his eyes were tired. They drew closer together as the breaches were made in the outer walls.

Fan and I hoped they would live for a golden wedding. I could almost see how they would look. Our children would have the coveted grandmother. She would be taller than our ideal, and not quite so full of century-old remembrances; but it would be delightfully entertaining to hear about "When your grandfather went to his first parish."

I liked their nearness and devotion to one another; the delicate, old-fashioned girlishness that came back to mamma; the thoughtful, chivalrous politeness that papa displayed. It might have been a lesson to modern sons: at all events, it was worth living for.

First I began to visit the parishioners. The little girls who had been in my Sunday-school class were young ladies, and really gave me a feeling of diffidence. And the old ladies who exclaimed, "Lawful sus! Why, I remember when your pa first came here, and you was a little mite of a girl."

Papa had said of Aunt Letty Perkins, "You must call on her as soon as you can, daughter; for she is confined to the house by the rheumatism. I begin to believe there may be a beneficial use in gossip, the poor old soul is so glad to have some one drop in and talk."

So I had to tell her over again about my husband and my house, how well the boys were doing, how smart the baby was, and all the salient points of my life.

"Well, I do say, and allers did, that there was no one like your mar for luck. Three girls well married! And you may notice it as a rule, that, if the oldest goes off first, the rest foller like a flock o' sheep. But if the oldest hangs on till two or three are gone, she's sure to be an old maid."

Which seemed to Aunt Letty the worst fate that could befall a woman.

Then there was Jennie Fairlie, living a charming life with her husband, her mother, and her babies. Mrs. Fairlie and Kate spent much of their time in the city. Wachusett they found very slow and dull; and the young men "always were stupid, you know," Kate declared.

"I feel sorry for her," said Fanny one day. "Her great aim in this life was to make a brilliant marriage. She is attractive, too, in a certain way; but she does not seem to accomplish her desire. She is quite faded with so much dissipation; and I do believe her mother would be willing to come back to the every-day living she once thought so tiresome. I can never be thankful enough that Dick Fairlie chose so wisely, and has such a delightful home. Papa says he is growing very much like his father. He stands by his wife and his faith in a manful fashion. Rose, it does seem as if papa was already reaping the fruits of his labor in some of the young men whose boyhood he watched over."

Dear, conscientious, painstaking papa! I am sure he deserved it. Though the reward does not always come in this life.

At the West Side they were still cheerful and serene; but Miss Lucy's fluctuations as to hope were over. She was thinner and weaker, and lay on the sofa by the windows most of the time. Her room was a marvel of

brightness and comfort. True, the Churchills had wealth enough for every indulgence; but there was something more here than mere wealth could give, — a noble and heavenly Christian resignation, a cheerfulness that inspired one, and took away the melancholy of death. It made me think of Sydney Smith's brave sweetness when he found that he was stricken with a mortal disease, and how he kept his friends from turning to the dark side of the picture. Now and then Miss Lucy said, "After I am gone, I want you to do thus or so," as if it was only a little journey.

She would not even admit that the babies troubled her, — a charming little girl of three, who was named after both aunts, but called Essie; and a frolicsome boy of ten months. Fan had grown a little stouter and rosier, and Winthrop more manly. They were a most fortunately matched couple, still inclining to the enjoyment and the amusement of life. She was quite a great lady in the parish, helping papa in many nameless ways, and working for the welfare and advancement of her kind. Certainly wealth could not have fallen into better hands. And what seemed loveliest of all to me was, that Winthrop was really a son to papa. He paid him a peculiar, well-bred deference; but I think that true and noble respect was in the Churchill blood.

Uncle Churchill was mellowing into the most delightful of old gentlemen. Small Essie tyrannized over him completely. Miss Churchill had hardly changed at all, unless it was to have her sphere of affection widened by the new-comers she took in so cordially.

"O Fan!" I said laughingly, as I sat in her pretty room, half listening to my baby, who was telling Miss Lucy, across the hall, marvellous stories of his papa's house, "doesn't it sometimes seem to you as if we were masquerading? Think of the day we were cleaning house, and the Maynards came in their carriage, and how

you hurried me off down stairs to entertain them! And the many pinches and small economies, and how grand we felt over the money the summer the boys boarded with us! Think of the carpet and chair and our new dresses! Why, Cinderella's godmother was as nothing to it. We were happy!"

"Of course we were!" cries Fan. "I can't think of a bit of unhappiness that I've ever had in my whole life, though we had to squeeze hard sometimes to make the great American eagle come out and do his duty nobly by us. And, Rose, I think the experience was just the thing for us, — at least for me. I can understand the feelings and wants of nice poor people, and see where the brightness is needed in their lives. And it is a pleasure to have something to give. Wealth has its responsibilities; but I do not see why people should wrap themselves up like mummies, with swaddling-clothes of ease, and never look out beyond."

"That sounds like papa;" and I smiled.

"We all borrow a little of him, I daresay. Sermons must be excellent, when one's own family remember them. But there isn't his like in all the world."

Were we foolish about him? Perhaps so. It is well that there should be a little of such foolishness left in this material world, where feeling is fast being reduced to a nonentity by the march of scientific facts, and affection is laughed to scorn on the highway. Parents may keep their children's respect; but the adoring love we all felt for him was above respect. To us he was the embodiment of truth, tenderness, honor, and generosity. The exceeding purity of his nature made him a companion for the most delicate girl; and, that he could meet a boy's strength and wants, Louis Duncan had fully tested; perhaps many another in a scale of degradation that we knew nothing about. No one rebuked a wrong more fearlessly, no matter in what sphere the offender

might stand; no one detected a sophism sooner: but with his rebuke was mingled the quality of heavenly kindness; with his exposed error, he never disdained to give a reason for the faith that was in him.

My visit took me back to my girlhood more than any other had done. Mamma and I fell into the old confidences. She was not yet done with the struggle of ways and means: indeed, I think she would always have planned closely, and bestowed the rest upon the poor. How unfeignedly she rejoiced that we three girls would never be likely to know the struggles of poverty!

And so I was feasted and *fêted*, and baby spoiled to his heart's content. But, when I crossed my own threshold once more, two strong arms infolded me; and the brave, manly voice, with a strand of pathetic tenderness in it, cried,—

“My little wife! Thank God you are come! It has been a lonesome time without you.”

“But if you had written, if you had spoken one word;” and my heart beat almost guiltily.

“As if I could not fight my own selfishness down! No: I am glad you staid, and were happy, but a hundred-fold more glad to have you home again.”

For this love's sake, they shall leave father and mother. And thus new homes are made all the world over. Ah who could ever open them to discontent and sin!

CHAPTER III.

' The little griefs, the petty wounds,
The stabs of daily care,
' Crackling of thorns beneath the pot '
As life's fire burns, now cold, now hot, —
How hard they are to bear! "

DR. KINNARD handed his young wife out of the carriage before the wide, hospitable porch, now abloom with roses. That certainly gave a generous welcome to the new bride, even if its voice was a silent one. Their month of pleasure had been a rare holiday for the doctor. He was looking younger, and a healthy color suffused his face, — a shrewd, humorous face withal, despite its gravity, which had been more of circumstances and studious habits than any original bent. He wore a full beard, cropped short now, after the Vandyke pattern, which the shape of the lower part of his face intensified; a broad forehead, with dark hair, curling a little at the temples, slow-moving, dark brown eyes, that were brooding over some internal theme, as well as external surrounding. When he seemed most oblivious of passing events, he surprised you by some remark that betrayed his keen sight. He was a trifle above the average height, with a little bend in the shoulders, that detracted still further from youthfulness.

A glorious summer day it had been, with the coolness of a recent shower in the air. At four they had reached Edgerly Station. From this point, you had the main business-part directly ahead of you; and the engine

pushed on through it. The river made a sharp turn just above ; and over the bridge lay much the prettiest part of the town, — country and town intermingled.

Mat had come down in the family carriage, with a hearty welcome for his master, and a rather shy one for his new mistress. But he was quite alone. Dr. Kinnard looked surprised, and knitted his brows, and asked if all were well at home.

“Very well, indeed, your Honor. And it’s a good thing to see you back. I hope you and the missis will like it so well, that you’ll never want to go again.”

A half-smile shone in the doctor’s eye as he replied.

They wound in and out through clumps of trees ; modern improvement not yet having cast its severe eye upon the crooks in the road, though perhaps it secured immunity by following the river. Then there was a more direct way for those whose time was more precious than their enjoyment.

Nelly noted the many beautiful points with intense appreciation. Dr. Kinnard liked the quick look and the silence. Noisy effusion was his abomination. He was thinking now what a delightful companion she would make for his hitherto solitary rides. She was thinking, with a strange awe, of her new home, and offering up a little womanly thanksgiving for having had her husband all to herself four delicious weeks.

Nelly Endicott had not married blindly ; though, at times, it seemed a little odd, even to herself, and so unlike her sisters’ brief, bright love-making. Dr. Kinnard had met Mr. Endicott at a clerical dinner given at the house of an intimate friend. A pleasant chord of sympathy was touched by some trifling bit of experience. The double marriage had but recently occurred ; and some one joked the good man on his houseful of girls.

“Seven !” exclaimed Dr. Kinnard. “Really, friend Endicott, I should like to see this happy family.”

"It is shorn of its glory," was the reply. "There are but five left."

A hearty laugh followed this announcement.

Later, they were discussing some new scientific discovery, in a corner by themselves.

"My wife was reading it aloud to me last evening; and we had quite a little argument. She inclines to Frere's opinion. I like to go over these things several times, before I form a positive decision."

The mother of seven girls reading heavy science aloud to her husband, instead of hunting up lovers for her daughters! Dr. Kinnard stared.

One day, being in the vicinity of Wachusett, he looked up the pleasant rectory, and found himself beguiled by a sort of pastoral idyl that he had hardly thought to meet outside of books. The exquisite and simple home-charm did its appointed work again, and touched a heart bordering on faithlessness and cynicism. He heard of Rose and the boys, — that remarkable first irruption of boys at the rectory; he met Mr. and Mrs. Winthrop, the Churchills, and presently bowed with unfeigned reverence to that pure and noble embodiment of womanhood, Mrs. Endicott.

So went on three years of friendship. Nelly, meanwhile, unfolded and blossomed, pretty, arch, lovable, and with a spice of innocent girlish coquetry, — the love of pleasing and being liked. Her city experience did her no harm.

If he had such a daughter!

It was absurd, of course. He could not imagine his little girl blooming into any of these Endicott graces. Yet if she had proper training; if aunt and grandmother; if the petty differences, bickerings, and fussiness, — but there his thoughts came to a sudden blank. It was not a pleasant home; neither could he alter these women's natures. He had hardened himself to them

Instead; kept to his own "den," where they were forbidden entrance. But twenty or thirty years of such home isolation suddenly looked unendurable to him.

Then he made an astounding, and at first mortifying discovery. His regard for sweet Nelly Endicott was not of the fatherly type. He had blundered into something deliciously different, yet positively ridiculous. Why, she would laugh at such an ancient stick presuming to make love to her. No: he was not quite such an old fool as that!

So he kept away, shutting himself up in his secluded den, or taking long drives. The reading, speculations, and metaphysical themes, became dull. He would not think of her: so he thought of his past life, and was amazed at its bareness, its solitary monotony.

He had been a hard student, and early graduate, looking forward to three years in Germany as the crowning pleasure of this toil. But his mother, having no daughters, busied herself with matrimonial projects for her son, and had selected Miss Mary Grove, an heiress, and a very stylish girl. She took them both to Saratoga with her, and managed to bring about an engagement in a month's time.

It did not keep him at home, though, to her great disappointment. Miss Grove flirted meanwhile; and, if she had met with a better offer, would have thrown over her betrothed with small compunction. But on his return she was twenty-five, and beginning to fade: so she speedily became Mrs. Kinnard. The mother, meanwhile, had gone to a neighboring State to be with an only and invalid sister. He thought that marriage would give him a better position; and in those days love was a secondary consideration.

After three years of city living and practice, he felt that he must retrench somewhat. He was fond of the country; and hearing of this place at Edgerly, where a

physician had just died, and whose estate, being heavily involved, was offered much below its real value, he made his bargain, and then announced his plans.

It was spring; and, since they must make a change, it would be rather stylish to go into the country. The house was large, roomy, delightful; and she could fill it with guests. And, if she was not satisfied, of course there could be another change.

The marriage had not been a happy one so far, — one engrossed with the world, the other with his profession. She might have persuaded with love and patience, but she had neither; and Dr. Kinnard objected stoutly to being driven. A husband, in Miss Mary Grove's estimation, was a sort of major-domo for outside affairs, providing houses and carriages, servants and money; asking no questions, and making few demands; obeying readily, and keeping out of the way for the most part. Fortunate circumstances had not brought them into collision hitherto; but now they really came face to face in the struggle for power.

Dr. Kinnard was, of all men, the hardest to struggle against. He had a warm interest outside: he had, also, the rare power of holding his tongue. He would not quarrel or dispute with a woman. He said what he would do; and, when others had expended their energy in wrangling, he simply reiterated his purpose. At the birth of the second baby, Miss Adelaide Grove was added to the family. After that, Mrs. Kinnard went to the city whenever she chose, and staid as long as she liked, without even consulting her husband. She was not going to be buried alive in a stupid country-place. But health failed, making her more dependent and exacting, but not more gentle. When she had played out nearly all her hand, and won nothing, she bethought herself of a last resort. She demanded *him*, his time and attention. If she could, she would fain

have kept him from every other patient. She upbraided him with coldness and neglect. Many a sharp-pointed arrow she launched at him; but he, knowing that the end could not be long delayed, was patient.

It came at last. It is a sad thing so to have lived, that those who should be nearest and dearest experience a sense of relief. Dr. Kinnard did not affect any violent sorrow. He was grave habitually. The neighbors pitied him and his motherless children, but admitted that both had an excellent friend in Miss Grove. He felt in those early days as if Adelaide was almost an angel, so quiet and orderly was the house kept, so peaceful was the atmosphere.

It had gone on up to this date. Now he began to brood a little over the happiness he had missed, to realize that matrimony was not the unalloyed evil he had once believed it. He told himself, that, if he did marry again, it should be some grave, kindly, domestic woman, who would be satisfied with the quiet pleasures of home. A bright young girl was folly.

One day he strayed over to Wachusett again. Mr. and Mrs. Endicott were out in the Churchill carriage. Daisy and Lily were engrossed with croquet and some young friends. Nelly came to receive the visitor.

"Oh, you will stay!" she cried with her most persuasive smile. "Papa would be so disappointed! He has been wondering what kept you away."

She asked it out of innocent eyes and frankest lips. He saw it, and turned away. He could tell her no shambling, evasive lie, nor yet the truth.

She remarked the strange demeanor. "Has any one offended you, Dr. Kinnard?" and then she took his hand, amazed at the vehement clasp.

"It is this, Nelly: you have a right to know. I have been an old fool! If I come frequently again, it must be as your lover, or else I must teach myself to stay away."

If he had kissed the scarlet face, or clasped the swaying figure in his arms, in short, indulged in any vehement demonstration, he might have wrecked his cause. He abstained, from a fine and rare delicacy, walked beside her to the study, seated himself on the capacious lounge, and began an indifferent conversation. Nelly sat amazed. Had she missed any thing more than her father's friend during these weeks?

The sound of carriage-wheels, and the familiar voices, broke in upon her dreamy mood. Fan was there with little Essie, who clapped her hands, and begged to kiss "Edif" just one little time. Then they came out on the porch again; and there was a cordial welcome, a merry chat, supper, and train-time almost before he knew. Ah, it would go hard with him if he could not win a daughter of this happy household.

With his good-by he said, just under his breath, "Am I to come, Nelly? Be generous, if you can."

Without raising her eyes, she held out her hand, saying softly and shyly, "I think you may."

A few weeks of half-covert courtship, and the regard was declared. Mrs. Endicott had wisely discussed some of the difficulties with her daughter, and then left her to the guiding hand of love, and that wiser Power to whom they had all been taught to turn, not only in sorrow, but in joy. He had proved a somewhat impatient lover, consenting to an engagement of six months only.

And now Nelly Kinnard had come to her husband's home and her husband's children. He was no longer all hers; yet with a bright, happy smile, she walked up the wide, flower-bordered path. They should see how willing she was to meet them more than half-way.

The hall-door opened, and Mrs. Kinnard appeared, rather stiff and uncertain; but the doctor's smile thawed her, and she kissed Nelly's winsome face.

"Where is Aunt Adelaide and the children?" the doctor asked in a quick tone.

Miss Grove answered the question by sweeping down the broad staircase in her voluminous silk robe. Tall and austere-looking, she held out her hand frigidly, uttered her precise welcome, "hoped the journey had been pleasant, as the weather had proved exceedingly fine. No doubt Mrs. Kinnard would prefer to go to her room immediately, as travelling was a rather tiresome and dusty pleasure. She would find every thing convenient. Will you go up, Barton, and show Mat what you wish to have done with the trunks that came this morning?"

Mat had shouldered the travelling-trunk. Dr. Kinnard led his wife up stairs.

The house was large, low-ceiled, with broad doorways and a great hall, the back part of which was used for dining-purposes. The oaken stairs were uncarpeted and polished. Above, half a dozen doors seemed to open; but the space was wide and airy. They crossed the threshold of the front chamber; and, for a moment, Dr. Kinnard stared oddly, almost angrily.

The floor was covered with matting which had an aged and rather dingy look. An old-fashioned bedstead and bureau of mahogany, some rush-bottomed chairs ranged against the wall, a few faded pictures, and, on the mantle, two tall silver candlesticks, with snuffers and tray in the middle.

"Upon my word!" and he laughed heartily; while Nelly glanced around blankly. "Not very inviting, eh, Nelly? I will tell you how it came. This has been kept as a spare chamber for some time; but Adelaide thought the furnituré, which belonged to Maud's mother, ought to be saved for her. When I bought the house, I took a lot of old traps with it; and I daresay these are some. I wanted to refurnish to please you: so I simply said, "Take out the things, and make it comfortable. It certainly has not been made beautiful; but we will change it in a day or two."

“Was this your room?” Nelly asked in a low tone.

He seemed to understand the unspoken question as well.

“No. It was the other side of the hall, next to Adelaide’s. It is to be Maud’s, I believe. I am in the habit of sleeping down stairs a great deal. Are you tired? Shall I unlock your trunk?”

A strange, unhomelike feeling grew upon Nelly every moment; but she tried to smile. Her husband had been awkwardly and bashfully loverlike these few weeks; and now he unstrapped, unlocked, and lifted out the tray. Suddenly he paused.

“Are you not going to take off your hat? Nelly, my dear little woman, I want you to feel that I, and all I have, belongs to you, and is at your service. I want you to help me give this place the cosey snugness of the rectory. I have never had such a home.”

Very little had been said concerning his household, except in the vague, incidental way that people skirmish about subjects that may have a little unpleasantness in them.

The place seemed queer to her, as if she had gone to the verge of civilization. But she laid aside her hat, then hid her face on her husband’s shoulder.

“O Barton!” she cried, “do you think they will love me?”

“We decided, you know, Nelly, that it would be a work of time. You must be brave, and not easily disheartened, my little girl. There are few homes and few mothers like yours, more’s the pity, in this weary world.”

“And the children?”

“Aunt Adelaide has them in very good training. To tell the truth,” and he sat down on the edge of the bed, “I haven’t bothered my head much about domestic management. My womenkind have been glad to take the authority, and I am so irregular indoors.”

He felt, too, that he was not the kind of father Nelly Endicott had known and loved. Strange that his children's stepmother should be first to make him aware of his shortcomings in that respect! Children were something of a bore to him when he had them year by year.

"I am to be their mother, you know," she said in a soft, pleading voice.

He was not quite sure but that he had married her for his own pleasure, first of all, and that every thing else must be a secondary consideration.

"Don't perplex yourself about these matters until you begin to feel at home," he returned in a tender tone. "I hope we shall all be good friends; but if you please and satisfy me, no one else in the world shall find fault. But are you not going to dress? Put on the blue silk, will you not? I like so to see you in it."

"Is there to be company?"

"Oh, no! And, while you are getting ready, I will run down to my 'den' a moment."

Some one called to him as he was passing through the hall. Her ear was on the alert for children's voices; but the door was quickly shut. She bathed her hands and face, laid aside her travelling-dress, and began to adorn herself for her husband's sake. She could hardly believe that he cared so much about dress; and yet she was pleased too. "I hope he will always take an interest in what I wear," she thought.

He returned presently, and was barely ready when the tea-bell rang. He had gathered a cluster of roses for her hair; and she placed one in his buttonhole as they went down together. The children stood in the hall.

"Children," Dr. Kinnard began with a certain pleasant firmness and sense of authority in his voice, which carried weight, as a man's most positive utterances should,— "children, I want to make you acquainted with this lady, whom I love, and have brought home as my wife and your

mother. I want you to love and respect her as well, and obey her in all things as you would me."

Maud made a prim little courtesy; while Bertie shyly took refuge in the folds of his grandmother's gown. Nelly stooped, and kissed them both. Maud gave her cheek coldly. Bertie flushed, and, perhaps with a boy's intuitive chivalry, returned the caress.

The table was the perfection of neatness and good old-fashioned feasting, — several kinds of preserves, besides the strawberries, half a dozen kinds of cake, bread, and biscuits. Nellie smiled, thinking of the simple rector's suppers. But this was in honor of the bride, no doubt. Instinctively she thought of the "dinner of herbs."

It was a silent, constrained meal. Dr. Kinnard talked but little at home; and his meals were oftenest taken alone. Maud copied her aunt's formal politeness, and the airs of a grown-up lady. Nelly could hardly forbear smiling at the unchildlike assumption. The prim, sallow little face with its pursed-up mouth, the light brown hair drawn tightly back from the temples with a comb, and tied in a sort of flowing knot behind. Her dress was a light plaid silk much flounced and puffed, finished with a wrought linen collar and cuffs, to which were added pin and ear-rings of handsome dark cameo (her mother's), and gold bracelets much too large.

"I wonder if she ever runs and plays like other little girls," Nelly commented inwardly. "How Miss Grove would be shocked by Tiny Tim's cognomen, mishaps and misadventures, and a host of children in the dooryard playing tea, and frolicking in the grass!"

At home, the table at meal-times had been a kind of domestic altar, on which each one laid some cheerful offering, — a bright thought, a pleasant incident, anecdote, plans, inquiry, interest. Every one looked forward to the meeting, glad to be together, and share each other's delights, content with the simplest fare and unflinching love.

This was cold and wearisome. Nelly was glad to rise, and followed the doctor's mother into the parlor. It had been furnished by the first Mrs. Kinnard, and was a rather strange medley. The carpet was dulled by the furniture (faded scarlet satin); and it seemed to have been some one's study to crowd in it every thing ornamental that could be had. The walls were adorned with pictures in worsted-work, which had been Mrs. Kinnard's girlish passion. But "Rebecca at the Well" looked dingy in her faded attire, and little Moses was very red in the face, while the princess was brown. "Pocahontas rescuing Capt. John Smith" puzzled Nelly for a long while.

Conversation languished. Dr. Kinnard plainly fidgeted. When Nelly could endure the restraint no longer, she suddenly exclaimed, —

"Can we not go out and walk among the flowers? It looks so tempting! and the air is delightful."

"Why, yes;" and Dr. Kinnard rose with alacrity.

"Will you not come?" said Nelly, holding out her hand to Maud in friendly overture.

"No, I thank you," answered the precise little voice; and she spread her ruffled skirts farther over the ottoman.

Nelly took her husband's arm, and sprang lightly down the steps.

Aunt Adelaide turned to Mrs. Kinnard as if she said, "There, I told you how it would be!"

"Can I go?" asked Bertie timidly.

"Indeed you cannot. Do you suppose they would be bothered with you? I was glad to see you decline, Maud: she only asked you out of compliment. You must remember this, my dear, and not put yourself forward. Poor children! You have lost your father as surely as if he were dead."

CHAPTER IV.

“We have a vision of our own,
Ah, why should we undo it?” — WORDSWORTH.

THE house stood a hundred feet or so from the street. On one side was a chestnut-grove; on the other flower, fruit, and vegetable gardens. It was on high ground, and at the back sloped quite precipitately, with an air of wildness. A small stream ran through this, which was a favorite resort with the doctor, who wended his way to the brow of it with a familiar unconsciousness.

“What an enchanting nook!” and Nellie paused suddenly.

“Do you like it? I am so glad!” with a sense of relief. “I am an old foggy, I suspect, although I have been so uncommonly frisky for a month; and I was just wondering, Nelly — ah, you are going to laugh at me.”

“And, like the children, ‘you won’t tell me just for that.’ But I am not going to laugh at you; and I do want your confidence.”

She glanced up with a sweet frankness that won him to proceed.

“I was just wondering whether I had any right to covet your youth and brightness, when I could give you so little in return.”

“Little! Do you call your love a small thing? Is it to be that — tell me?” in her pretty, imperious manner.

“God forbid!” he answered solemnly. “It is the passion of my life.” Then with a sudden change of color

and tone, "But the house seems a dull cage to put you in, my darling. Will you show me how to make it brighter, — like the home I took you from?"

"Gladly, if I may. I shall want to spend half the summer in these enchanting woods. I have no sewing to do, and no parish-visiting: so I shall be as idle as a butterfly."

"I shall take you out to drive with me. There are many pretty little villages around. Then there is a very passable library in town, to which I always subscribe, as a public-spirited citizen should. And there are some pleasant people, only I don't seem to know much about the women in a social way;" and he made a grimace as he drew her down beside him on a rustic seat.

It was so peaceful and dreamy, that Nelly, instead of replying, fell into a reverie. Her dream of the new home had been rather highly colored, perhaps. Dr. Kinnard was as unlike her father as possible, though a fancied resemblance had won her in the beginning. He thought a great deal of his own personal comfort, and the things which pleased him; tender, and with a deep sympathy when his nature was roused, yet lacking altogether that profound and vital Christian principle which actuated Mr. Endicott. Nelly had learned this during her month of honeymoon. He had been boundlessly indulgent to her, — partly because he loved her very much, and partly because he had nothing else to do. She was not so unreasonable as to expect this always: in fact, life was too serious a problem to her to be spent in such sweet idleness. A great work lay before her; but how was she to begin? Would he help her in it, guide with his maturer judgment, strengthen her with the earnest manliness that was a part of his nature in his profession?

"What now, little one?" for the keen eyes had been studying her. Down in his heart he had a fear of yearning homesickness for kith and kin at Wachusett.

She flushed and smiled. "I was only thinking," she made answer.

"Of home?" he asked almost jealously.

"No, not of home," in her clear, frank tone, raising her soft dark eyes to his, — "of my life here; of what I must do."

"The great thing is to be happy. I am not going to have your young face clouded with cares and worries."

"I hope it will not cloud easily," she replied with tender gravity.

"I want it bright and sweet for myself, selfish old fellow that I am;" and he laughed.

There seemed so much to say! yet how could she approach so delicate a matter? When Dr. Kinnard chose to ignore, or pass over any subject, he did it in a quietly persistent manner. Circumstances, and the kind of women with whom his life had been passed, had rendered this necessary as a sort of armor. He allowed the household to have its own way, except where it interfered with him personally. When his mother had first come to Edgerly, there had been an undercurrent of bickering and complaint. He tried his best to heal and smooth, then gave it up firmly. "Settle your own affairs," he would say. By holding aloof, he preserved the better his own authority when he did speak. Both women found there was a limit they could not pass, and that he would not commit himself to either side. The eternal discussion of things, that seems to afford many women unalloyed satisfaction, proves a bore to most men.

And, though Nelly felt in a most confidential and questioning mood, she wisely refrained, turning her attention to the landscape, and picking out two or three points that were great favorites with him. It was so delightful to have a companion who could appreciate something beyond a ball-dress. And there they sat until the twilight gloom began to gather.

"Come, it is growing damp," he said suddenly.

"And we have staid away too long already; but it was so beautiful! Why, it is all like a picture."

"It was pretty rough and wild when I first came here, and had been shamefully neglected. But I was tired of the city, and took a great fancy to it. Mat has a good deal of taste too. He is always surprising me by some improvement. I like to have such work done without being pestered by a thousand questions. I don't expect him to understand a case of fever; but I might reasonably imagine him to know about landscape-gardening."

"He is very fond of you, isn't he?"

"Well, yes. I was his friend through some hard trouble. He had a drunken termagant for a wife; and I do suppose she beat and neglected his little baby so that it was a clear case of murder; only the law couldn't well take hold of it. Then Mat fell sick, and I had him brought over here, and put her in jail to keep her away from him. One day she was going on worse than usual, when she was taken with a fit, fell down stairs, and broke her neck, and poor Mat was free."

"What a terrible story!"

"Yes. So the poor fellow staid right along with me. That must be seven years ago. He is as good as any two men I ever had, and, in some ways, handy as a woman. He always sweeps my rooms, and looks after my belongings. Then he has that old country respect, which is quite refreshing in these days of insolent independence."

They sauntered indoors, unconscious of the unfriendly criticisms of the last half-hour. The lamp was already lighted; and Nelly felt a little conscience-smitten.

"Where is Bertie?" asked his father with a quick glance.

"His hour for retiring is invariably eight. — I think, Mrs. Kinnard," addressing Nelly, "that there is nothing like regularity in bringing up children. I have had the

care of Herbert from his birth, and he has a peculiar will," — "like his father," she longed to add, — "and it does not answer to allow him to overstep the slightest boundary."

Nelly acknowledged with a slight bow the honor of a remark addressed exclusively to herself. She glanced at Maud, who seemed to be in the same position on the ottoman that she was an hour ago; but in her eyes there was a very weary look.

"Doctor," began Miss Grove presently, "your mother and I have been discussing another point, which we refer to you. Of course, you will have some kind of a reception to introduce Mrs. Kinnard into her new sphere. What do you say to next Wednesday evening?"

Dr. Kinnard looked helplessly at his new wife.

"Is it necessary? Do you care, Nelly?"

"Necessary!" echoed Miss Grove indignantly. "Why, yes, unless a man marries a woman of whom he is ashamed."

"Then let us have it, by all means. Next week Wednesday. I must remember and not make any engagement. There must be some kind of supper, I suppose? And what else? Dancing, and all that fol-de-rol?"

"If Mrs. Kinnard desires dancing. I do not dance myself," was the severe rejoinder.

"I think a simple wedding-reception with a supper would be the best," said Nelly quietly. "It is always pleasant to know the people among whom one's lot is cast."

"There is some very good society at Edgerly and Westwood, though, no doubt, quite different from the narrow bounds of a single parish," said Miss Grove.

"Our parish bounds were not very narrow," was the gentle reply.

"Excuse me, I have always heard that Episcopalians were exceedingly exclusive. Of course, Mrs. Kinnard,

you will make your first appearance in your husband's church, as we have a family pew. And really, I believe the Episcopalians have not gained much of a foothold here. The old church is at the extreme end of the town, and is not considered at all fashionable."

"Adelaide, we were discussing the party, if you please," said the doctor pointedly. "Will you take the management of it? There are a few people whom I would like to ask. — And, Nelly, I think you must send for Daisy. — And will you," glancing at Miss Grove, "learn what will be needed, and let Mat order it?"

"Certainly, since you put it into my hands. Then we will say Wednesday evening of next week. I shall write the invitations myself, as they are considered much more stylish. You can hand me your list to-morrow. Is that nine? — Maud, we must say good-evening, and retire. — Mrs. Kinnard, breakfast is at eight, dinner at half-past twelve, and supper at six, invariably, whether the doctor is here or not. Irregular meals betoken a very careless household, in my estimation; and there is nothing like system for young people. — Say good-night, Maud."

The elder lady bowed with sweeping stiffness, and Maud with almost comical primness. No tender good-night kiss, no cordial wishes. The doctor gave a careless nod, as if he was glad to be rid of them thus easily. Then he turned to his mother, and began to make some casual inquiries as to what had transpired in his absence.

Mrs. Kinnard, senior, had been scrutinizing the pretty doll her son had so foolishly married. Oddly enough, from her first entrance as an inmate of her son's house, she had been afraid he would marry Adelaide Grove. Both women had tried hard for the supremacy; but Miss Grove kept that over the children, and the rule of the household, in some degree. But when his engagement to that designing young flirt, Miss Endicott, was announced, his mother was astounded.

“Barton,” she said, “there is no need whatever of your marrying again. Adelaide can look after the children; and I can supervise the house. You will find that you are plunging yourself into a sea of trouble. But, if you *must* marry, Adelaide would be so much more suitable. She is nearer to the children than any stranger can be; she is experienced, and” —

But Mrs. Kinnard was not suffered to recount the newly discovered virtues of Adelaide Grove.

“Mother,” said Dr. Kinnard, with a solemnity that effectually hushed caviling, “I pleased you years ago by marrying Mary Grove: now I shall please myself by marrying Nelly Endicott. As for the children, in their own mother’s lifetime they were left to the care of servants and Aunt Adelaide. When they are old enough, I shall send them away to school. Miss Endicott has been brought up amongst children; and, if I were to die in a year’s time, I could leave mine in no better hands. I hope you will love and welcome her as a daughter; but I am marrying her for myself alone.”

Mrs. Kinnard was awed by her son’s manner; and she admitted to herself that he was of an obstinate turn. But now she fancied that it really had been the desire of her life, instead of the dread, that Adelaide should fill this position. So the two women formed a tacit league, cemented by mutual disappointment. If Dr. Kinnard had not married at all, Miss Grove would have been satisfied; but that he should dare to choose youth and beauty in preference to experience and money was an insult. Since she could not venture to retaliate upon him, she nursed her indignation, and kept it warm for the new-comer.

Nelly understood, and was chilled by the coldness. She tried to keep up a little conversation; but it was difficult. Dr. Kinnard was annoyed by his mother’s want of cordiality, yet he felt that some excuse was due

her age, and that, at her time of life, people did not readily adapt themselves to changes. But it was so different at the rectory! That atmosphere of love, and frank, unaffected gayety, had in it such an air of wholesome, winning warmth; it so softly broke through the crust of selfish reserve; it gave so freely of its best, making a continual feast, alike for the chosen guest, the wayfarer, and the home-circle.

It was a relief when the elder lady retired. Aunt Adelaide had not condescended to make a second appearance.

Nelly drew a long breath. Dr. Kinnard roused himself from a mood of thoughtfulness.

"I daresay you are tired to death. I'll take a look in the office, and then we will go up stairs."

"Oh! let me go with you. I want to see your den;" and Nelly's face was so animated and eager, that he smiled fondly.

"Come along, then. I'll call Jane to shut up the parlor. It's a dreary place to me: parlors always are—except yours at the rectory."

"That was hardly a parlor. Do you know I like the old term so much better,—drawing-room? It seems as if people might draw together from mutual interest and sympathy; but the word 'parlor' makes me think of a room handsomely furnished, and darkened to sombreness, where you receive ceremonious calls."

He laughed. They had crossed the hall; and, finding the door locked, he said,—

"I will go around and open it. Nay, don't come. You'll break your neck over the rubbish."

She had learned in her month of honeymoon that Dr. Kinnard was prompt to exact obedience in little things. It fretted him to have a person disregard his orders, and do something a little different, when the first request would have been no more trouble. There was no foolish pride on Nelly's part; perhaps because her mother had set that

noblest of all examples,—obedience. There had been a certain riotous lawlessness at the rectory, though it was more exuberance of spirit than any positive disregard of authority.

“I have kept you waiting,” he said in apology. “My lamp was not in perfect order. This is my office. Does it wear a formidable aspect?”

“On the contrary, I think it the most homelike place I have seen. Why, you are a very king here,” she said gayly.

The room was large, with three windows across the front, and a side-entrance leading out on a smaller porch, much used by the doctor and his patients. On the hall-side it was filled with book-shelves, with the exception of the doorway, and also the corner by the chimney. On the opposite side stood a great Turkish lounge, covered in russet leather, and several capacious arm-chairs. The carpet was soft, and in rich, subdued colors. There was a large table in the centre, covered with books and pamphlets, and just over this a swinging-lamp, with a white porcelain shade. Then there were pictures, brackets, busts, antique vases, and various odds and ends, that only a man with a peculiar and cultivated taste would be likely to collect.

“And this is my ‘den.’ It is in confusion now; for Adelaide sent down some of the things that used to be in the sleeping-room.”

“I thought that looked exceedingly bare and prim,” Nelly said mirthfully. “May I not make a raid, and reclaim some of them? or do you delight in confusion?”

“Well, not exactly. You see, the women are forbidden this part of the house. I like Mat’s care better. He does not stow articles away in unheard-of places, and then argue an hour concerning the fitness and propriety of it.”

Nelly had too much wisdom to resent the exclusion of the family in general. Yet a kind of nearness and home-

feeling was established at once between her and the rooms. This one contained an odd collection,—a large piece of furniture, not unlike an old-fashioned mahogany sideboard, with capacious closets at the bottom, and several, rather curiously carved shelves at the top, on which was a promiscuous collection; a wardrobe; a roomy writing-desk; and a great square-cornered sofa, where one might sleep very comfortably indeed.

“You see,” went on the doctor in an explanatory manner, “I do sleep here a great deal. Mother, Aunt Adelaide, and the children have the rooms over opposite. There is a stairway here, which leads to the room above: so you see, by that means, I keep quite to myself. That connects again with the spare chamber, our room.”

“Then I can visit you without any trouble, as I foresee already that I shall take a great fancy to this ‘den’ of yours. Do not be surprised if I bring a work-basket and a rocking-chair, and make myself at home.”

He shrugged his shoulders, and bestowed upon her a humorous smile.

“Will you allow me to light a cigar, Mrs. Kinnard? I am full of confirmed bachelor-habits; and I cannot give up the privileges of this den.”

She nodded a gay little assent. He came and sat down on the sofa, put his arm around her, and drew her nearer to him. It was so strange, and yet so delightful, to have some one to pet; though there was an occasional shy awkwardness that amused Nelly.

“I hope you will soon get to feeling at home,” he began presently.

“I shall do my best. And if they will all love me a little”—

“Will not my love satisfy?”

“But have I not taken upon myself duties towards the others as well? The children”—

“Aunt Adelaide is to teach them, for the present.

When they are a little older, I shall pack them off to school."

It sounded so hard and unsympathetic to her, fresh from a centre of family affection. It would be an easy way of solving the difficulty, no doubt.

"I cannot help but think that home is the best place for a girl; that is, if it is the right kind of a home."

"Exactly, Nelly. But, with all due deference to your loving and generous heart, I think a few weeks will convince you that there are some very inharmonious influences here, and that this cannot truly be called a model home. Maud, as you must have seen to-night, is a perfect little prig. I don't complain of her quiet, or her nice manners, but the primness, and air of consequence. She knows that when she is of age she will have quite a little fortune. The money their mother left was invested; and will not be touched until then. Bertie is rough in many ways, and has serious faults; but I have insisted that he should not be clipped and trained into a Miss Nancy. I cannot abide girlish boys. Aunt Adelaide has queer notions, and is sure her way is best and right."

"Must she have charge of the children?" asked Nelly timidly.

"I couldn't well send her away. She came here at Bertie's birth; and she was needed sorely enough, God knows. She was very different from—the children's mother. After her death, she took sole charge of them; and I must admit they have not lacked any material comfort. I daresay you have discovered by this time, Nelly, that I am not extravagantly fond of children."

She had, indeed. She saw how very easily she could crowd them out of their father's heart.

"I suppose it is a fault. While I could never beat or starve a little child, or thwart it of any needful pleasure, still children do not interest me as a book or an educated companion does. Therefore I was relieved to have Aunt

Adelaide take them so completely off my hands. And I felt it would be really ungenerous to refuse her a year or two more, because I had consulted my own pleasure in marrying you."

"You were quite right there, I think. It would have been very hard."

"You see, I never expected to marry. But at last I began to long for a little dark-eyed witch, my neighbor's daughter; and my resolves were scattered to the winds."

"And if you should repent?"

"Nelly, you must not let me!" and he pressed her closer, with a vehement clasp. "I am not fickle or unreasonable in my demands,—queer, I may be. Can't you take some of the quirks out of me?—not by any sudden wrenching-off, but the gentler treatment, when a man's vanity is not wounded, and he doesn't realize that he is being managed. I think there may be some good traits in my nature; but they have been overlaid with rubbish of all sorts."

"It will be my first entertaining duty to go on a voyage of discovery," she answered playfully.

"What were we talking of? Oh! Aunt Adelaide. Well, you see at this juncture, I could not well send her away, or refuse her the oversight of her sister's children for a while longer. But when they go to school,—ah, Nelly, I have solved the puzzle!" and he laughed heartily, in his mellow, wholesome manner.

"You will prescribe matrimony? Ah, you see I am good at guessing;" and she gave an audacious little smile.

"But who will bell the cat?" and an expression of comical anxiety pervaded his face.

"Ah! your expedient has one weak side. No doubt there are men who would be only too glad to take Miss Grove and her money; but she is too wise a woman to make a very poor bargain. And she may have had some"—

“Love-episode, you think? No: I don't believe her heart is in any one's grave. But we must make the best of her as she is; and you must not feel hurt, my darling, at any coldness or reserve on her part.”

He pressed his young wife to his heart. She was pretty and sweet, and had that beguiling way of womanly wisdom which enchanted him, while he had not abounding faith in it. He had seen so much of life, of women, of matrimony, that sometimes he was tempted to scoff a little. And yet he felt, that, for the first time, a true and simple love had blossomed in his pathway. No one should snatch it from him: he even hated to think that any one should share it. With the unreasonableness of a man's strong and imperious passion, he half wished they could go away by themselves, and shut out the rest of the world.

CHAPTER V.

“ He that hath a victory lost
May discomfit yet a host;
And it often doth befall,
He who conquers loses all.”

NELLY slept late the next morning, and had just time to hurry down to breakfast. Jane was inexorable about the meals, as far as the family were concerned, and agreed famously on this point with Miss Adelaide; out to the master she was all indulgence. She would leave any work to spread a dainty feast for him. She had not approved of this marriage.

“ It’s a foolish thing; and the doctor will be sorry enough when he comes to his senses,” she said to Mat on the wedding-day. “ But men never do know when they are well off. I’m not going to have any pert young thing ordering around in *my* kitchen, I can tell you ! ”

So when Jane met her in the hall, in the bloom and freshness of her youth, and her pretty white morning-dress, with roses at her throat, leaning so familiarly on the arm of the doctor (whom she respected to the uttermost, and really felt a little afraid of), a frown darkened her face.

The rest were in their places. Maud looked thinner and more sallow in her yellowish brown-linen dress, elaborately embroidered with black, the ruffle of the same not relieved in the slightest. Both children responded rather shyly to Nelly’s joyous good-morning. The ladies made a few commonplace comments; the doctor talked a

little business; and the meal was hurried through. Outside, countless roses were blooming; but not one graced the table or the apartment.

"Will you give me the list of people whom you would like invited next week?" asked Miss Grove, as she rose.

"Yes. — Nelly, come in the office a moment, will you?" and the doctor placed his hand on her shoulder.

Maud stared. So did Jane, who had just entered to remove the breakfast-dishes. Asked in the office, where no one else was tolerated!

Nelly followed, unconscious of the great favor.

Mrs. Kinnard turned to Miss Grove. "What shall we order for dinner to-day?" She always consulted Miss Grove, though at first she had made a great effort to get the supreme power in her hands. She looked after the house, did the mending, and was the intermediate link between Jane and Miss Grove.

All parties would have been still further scandalized had they seen the doctor kiss Nelly's peachy cheek, and turn her around in undisguised admiration.

"Now, my dear girl, if you will sit down and scribble off a list of names for me, while I look over a few business matters. I ought to have done it last night, instead of making love to you; and there will be no rest for Aunt Adelaide until this party is well under way."

"And you don't like parties?"

"Who said I didn't, eh? I am not quite an old bear! There will be some pleasant people, whom I really do want you to know. And it is the fashion, I suppose. The part I shall not enjoy is the being up on exhibition. But, if people will dance, they must pay the piper."

Nelly smiled, and said she was ready.

Dr. Kinnard repeated a few names, and then lost himself in some perplexing figures. Rousing suddenly, and seeing Nelly in an expectant attitude, he went on, with sundry breaks, until the list was finished.

He ran his eyes over it. "I daresay it will vex Aunt Adelaide a little; but I want some of my friends as well. Now run and get yourself ready, and we will go in town."

Nelly made her bed, dusted her antique furniture, explored her closets, hung up a few dresses, and then put on her pretty silvery gray suit. She laid her hat and gloves on the bed, and sat down by the window to wait, espying Bertie off in the distance, climbing a fence. The scene was delightful, varied by little hills with breaks between, and the river winding about in the distance. Presently a bell rang that set Nelly to wondering.

It was for Herbert, but had to be rung sharply a second time. Then he came hurrying up the steps in a noisy fashion.

"Herbert," said his aunt, "go down stairs, and come up as a gentleman should. I am ashamed of you this morning. Ever since you have been allowed to go over in the woods, you have grown wilder and ruder."

He came up, and the door was closed. Nelly was tired of her lonely idleness, and began to unpack a few articles. What a dreary look the room had, and the parlor down stairs! Would she ever feel at home? Would she ever dare to say, "Mother" to Mrs. Kinnard. She winked a tear out of the corner of her eye. And here were her pretty vases and ornaments; bridal gifts some of them. She would have the brackets put up; and, when the new furniture came, her room should be bright and cheerful.

"Nelly," called the doctor; and she ran down.

"Here is one of my good friends, to whom I want to introduce you, — Judge Denslow."

Nelly bowed to a short, stout, fresh-colored, and good-humored person; and there followed a little pleasantry, with congratulations.

"Are you out for a morning-walk?" noticing her hat.

"Oh, no! I" — and Nelly looked at her husband with a sudden flush.

"I was to take her out," interposed the doctor.

"Really, Mrs. Kinnard, you have made a good beginning. Now, I always have to wait for my women-folks. The sex, as a general thing, is half an hour behindhand."

"That is something of a libel. Say the exceptions are," she returned.

"It wouldn't do for me to go back on my word, you see: I should lose weight;" and there was a mirthful twinkle in his eye.

Another interruption occurred. "The doctor was wanted right away at Mis' Gale's. Mr. Gale had been in cramps all night. They only heard an hour ago that the doctor was home. The wagon was here, and he could go right back."

"Very well: I won't be long, Nelly. — Don't hurry off, judge;" and, seizing his hat, the doctor vanished. Judge Denslow remained a while longer, then made his adieus. Nelly looked over the books, straightened a picture, dusted the furniture, and gave an air of tidiness to the place, without any officious meddling or neatness. Then she glanced in the "den." How she should like to take some nice quiet day, — ah! all days would be quiet enough here, — and make this room pretty and homelike! She had an inward fancy that she should use it a great deal. The sitting-room did not look very cosey or inviting; and there was no other refuge beside her own apartment. She could sew here, and read; and her husband would have a welcome smile the instant he entered the house.

He rushed in then. "Oh, here you are!" he cried in a quick tone. "I was detained longer than I expected. Mat has Dolly all ready: so come along."

With that he hurried her out, and packed her into the buggy; and in a minute they were spinning down the road. She thought about the list of invitations that was lying on the study-table; but she would not annoy him now by speaking of it.

There were a few calls on the way ; and several friends came out to the carriage to see the doctor's new wife. His marriage had taken Edgerly quite by surprise ; because most people, if they thought about it at all, fancied he would end by marrying Miss Grove.

Edgerly was a rather pretty town, being built partly on the side-hill, where the rows of cottages and terraced gardens reminded Nelly of a Swiss picture. The business streets wore a brisk air, with their stores and offices, and the continual passing of pedestrians.

"We haven't said a word about what we want," exclaimed the doctor suddenly. "I don't believe I know much about such affairs. I never furnished a room in my life. When it is done, I can tell whether I like it or not."

"You mean to refurnish it completely?" asked Nelly rather timidly.

"Why, of course. We must have something that looks a little more like you. We need a pretty carpet to begin with ; and here is just the place."

So they went in ; and the clerks displayed their wares with alacrity. For a moment an odd misgiving crossed Nelly's mind. How rich was Dr. Kinnard, and ought she to buy a beautiful Brussels carpet for her sleeping-room? But the doctor tumbled them over, examined, and finally narrowed the choice to three, all of which were unusually pretty, Nelly thought : so her scruples went to the winds, and she made her selection.

"And now for some furniture. Nelly, I suppose you have a woman's love for the regulation black walnut?"

"I really do not know," was the slow reply.

"Perhaps I associate it a great deal with sickness," he said. "But, in spite of its richness, it has a gloomy look to me, as if it was more fit for dowagers than young wives. I am a queer old fellow, am I not?"

Nelly smiled, and resolved that the room should be

light and bright. After some search, they found a suit to their taste, and ordered it.

"Upon my word," declared the doctor, "you must be an exception in shopping. Here we are all through, and with some time still on our hands. Let me see—we can drop into the library; and I will introduce you to Mr. Grey. And there is quite a pretty picture-store, where I have fallen into the bad habit of idling away my time. It will not look quite so grand after our city experiences; but now we have come back to plain country-life."

Nelly thought of the dinner, and would not allow him to loiter so much to-day. But then he wanted to show her one of his favorite drives, and it was the longest way home. The family were seated around the table, and the dessert had been brought on.

"You left no word," began Miss Grove; "and I do endeavor to make my own and the children's habits regular."

"Oh, that is all right enough!" he replied, as Nelly went to take off her hat and gloves. Then he glanced over the table. "Has any thing been kept warm?" he asked.

"How could Jane, when she did not know what time you might be expected?" was the reply, in a complaining tone.

Nelly returned at that moment, and took her seat beside her husband. Miss Grove sat at the head of the table, with a child on either hand. Dr. Kinnard was a trifle touched and mortified to have Nelly crowded into a secondary place. She ought to be mistress. And this cold meat was not very inviting, carved half an hour ago, nor the lukewarm vegetables. But, while he was considering, an imperative summons came for him.

"I must go straight to Lakeland," he said; "and I may not be back until evening." Then he lapsed into silence and hurried eating; while Mrs. Kinnard and Miss Grove kept up a small stream of neighborhood gossip.

Nelly followed him to the office, and made her adieux out of the reach of prying eyes.

"Don't get lonesome, little girl. I wish I could take you; but I cannot now. Good-by."

She had not the courage to go back and finish her desert, though she admitted rather grimly to herself that she was still hungry. Bertie had half an hour for play at noon; while Maud went to her music-practice. Nelly retired to her room, and settled a few more articles in the pantry. Then she bethought herself of letters to write; and she had a presentiment that she could write better now than when she came to have more experience with the household, since at present she could judge them as strangers.

She went down to the office, and ensconced herself in an easy-chair, finding so much to say, that the time passed rapidly. Once her attention was aroused by a pretty pony-phaeton being driven to the door. Aunt Adelaide and Maud stepped off the porch, and took their seats. Then the house grew lonesomely quiet; for Bertie had gone out to play. After her letters were finished, she took a short walk, but met no one. Even Mrs. Kinnard did not seem to be visible anywhere. She was thankful to hear the tea-bell ring, though she felt something like an interloper, as she went out alone.

"Did you have a pleasant drive this afternoon, Maud," she asked, when the silence grew oppressive.

Maud glanced at Aunt Adelaide; then, pursing up her mouth, replied that it was pleasant.

"And you are very fond of it, I daresay. The pony and phaeton are a perfect match."

"They are Aunt Adelaide's," volunteered Bertie.

"Herbert!" said his aunt warningly.

"I suppose you would like to have a pony of your very own, Bertie?" Nelly ventured in a friendly tone, desirous of being social with some one.

"You bet!" was the eager, boyish reply.

"Herbert, leave the table immediately. How often have I told you that I will not tolerate slang; and this is the second time I have had to speak to you," said his aunt in a severe tone.

"O Miss Grove! allow me to intercede for him," exclaimed Nelly, blushing like a culprit herself; and Bertie hesitated a moment, with his eyes fixed upon her.

"Herbert, you will go straight to bed for this disobedience. I shall come up to your room presently. — Mrs. Kinnard, I beg leave to explain that I have the care of these motherless children. Your good sense will show you that any interference is not only injudicious, but quite unfortunate in regard to them. Too many masters end by spoiling the child, as I have explained to the doctor; and you will admit that obedience is a child's first and best lesson. Without that, you cannot do any thing."

Herbert went reluctantly. For an instant, indignation threatened to overmaster Nelly; but, with a strong effort at self-control, she kept silent, though her face was burning with a crimson flush. She felt, that, if Dr. Kinnard had been present, Miss Grove would not have dared quite so much. It was cruel, too, to send a hungry child to bed supperless; and she could not but feel that all this assumption of authority was an insult to her.

"We called at the Blairs' to-day," began Miss Grove, addressing the elder Mrs. Kinnard. "They are still in grief about their son's unfortunate marriage."

"Oh, do tell me! Will they recognize her? Such a shameless thing as it was!"

"They have not asked her home yet. Walter Blair has come into possession of his uncle's estate, you know; and they mean to go to housekeeping there immediately. I suppose she cannot be kept out of society."

Nelly was not paying much attention to the subject;

but she learned presently that Mrs. Walter Blair had been a mill-hand, and that her mother, who was a widow, kept some boarders. And that this young woman should presume to marry into one of the old families was considered a capital crime on her part. The dividing lines, it seemed, were very strongly drawn at Edgerly; and, as Nelly listened to the narrow and selfish strictures, she was thankful that her father was a clergyman, even if he was poor.

Mrs. Kinnard retired to the sitting-room, and took up some netting. Maud followed her aunt. Nelly sat silent, every pulse still flaming with resentment. It was plain that these women meant to do nothing for her comfort or happiness. She had said she would be patient, and win their love; but, oh, how hard the task was likely to prove!

A few tears dropped silently as the keen sense of injustice burned at her heart. Jane cleared away the things, lighted the hall-lamp, and disappeared amid her kitchen-duties. Nelly counted the weary moments. She knew it would be useless to settle herself to reading: so she sat and thought of the happy home she had left, of the community of kindly interests, the tender affection that was not ashamed of making itself known.

Did she hear a wagon? Yes: that was her husband. She sprang up, and ran through the hall, to find both doors locked on the inside. He had entered evidently from the side-way; for now she could hear his step.

"Barton!" she cried eagerly, — "Barton, let me in!"

The door was opened.

"Who locked this door?" she said with sudden heat. Was she to be considered an intruder everywhere?

"Why, Jane must have turned the keys. She has done it a good deal to keep Bertie out, as he has a propensity for meddling; and didn't Aunt Adelaide go out?"

"But I was here myself until after five; and, Barton,

no servant has a right to lock me out of any room in my husband's house!"

"Upon my word, you are brilliant enough for a tragedy queen! I don't imagine she thought of you. She might have heard you going out, and come to see who it was, then turned the keys by way of precaution. I sometimes leave chemicals about. There, don't get so excited over a trifle. What, crying too!" for, as he kissed her, he felt a tear on her cheek.

"I have been so miserably lonesome, and" — but she checked herself. This was no time for complaint: so she added, "Have you had any supper?"

"No; but Jane will give me a cup of tea. She looks out for me at such times."

"Cannot I go and make it for you?" she asked with a sudden intense longing to have some active share in his life.

"Not to-night, dear. There, that is Jane's signal," as a little bell was rung. "Stay here until I return. When I want extra meals, I go out in the kitchen, and sup by myself. You see, it would make no end of trouble to keep the table standing, or reset it."

"Well, let me go with you;" and she glanced up beseechingly.

"I will not be five minutes."

She clung closer to him. "Why should I not go out and pour your tea, or cut your bread?" she cried. "Surely I am no fine lady; and you know it well."

"Jane doesn't arrange for company; and she might feel — in fact, it was a sort of agreement entered into long ago. Once cannot make much difference to you."

"It makes a good deal of difference to-night," she said gravely. "Am I not to be Jane's mistress?"

"My dear Nelly, I am afraid Jane would not brook a mistress in the ordinary use of the term. Mother and Aunt Adelaide have both tried it; and it came to an open

contest. If Jane remained, no one was to interfere with her in the kitchen. She is a faithful and capable woman, and I should be sorry to lose her. I had trouble enough before she came."

"As if my going out and sitting beside you would make any trouble," persisted Nelly.

"Jane would take umbrage. I know her well. There, my dear, let me go for this once. Next time we will have it different."

He unclasped her hands, and she sat down quietly, but with a swelling heart. Had they all conspired against her? Had they bound her husband to certain regulations before she came? and was he weak enough to purchase peace in that manner?

He was not absent long. On his return, he picked her up from the arm-chair, sat down, and took her on his knee.

"Well," he began presently, seeing that she was silent, "what have you been doing this afternoon? Did you get very lonesome?"

"I was not lonesome until this evening," she made answer.

"It is a great change for you. I think we must ask one of the girls over; for sometimes I cannot help staying out late. Are you homesick so soon?"

"No, Barton, I am not homesick. I simply want a place, and something to do, some interest. Jane, it seems, is to take charge of the house, and desires no interference. Miss Grove takes charge of the children, and desires no interference: so I almost wonder what you brought me here for."

"To love me a little," he answered with a tender gravity. "I saw a pretty rose in my neighbor Eadicott's garden; and I was foolish enough to sigh for its sweetness. Will its thorns prick me, or will it fade with dissatisfaction? Or will it be patient a while, until circumstances turn in its favor?"

Nelly's heart beat tumultuously; and she glanced up with tears shining in her eyes.

"Perhaps it was not right or sensible in an old chap like me to so covet my neighbor's goods;" and a sweet, rather humorous smile broke over the face. "But I have done it, and, what is more, climbed the garden-wall, and carried off the rose which had lived in sunshine, calm, and sweet; and here it finds the shade. Nelly, I have had a good deal of it in my life;" and his voice sank to a sudden seriousness. "I have learned many things by experience, best of all, patience. There is a great deal that one can do by degrees, especially with women;" and here he smiled with a peculiar twinkle in his eye.

"Oh!" she cried with remorseful tenderness, throwing her arms around his neck, "I did mean to be so patient and tender and wise; and here I am."

"Not very thorny, after all, but quite as reasonable as one can expect at twenty, and only a month married."

"How good you are! And you are tired too: I can see it in your face. Can I not do something to comfort you?"

He studied her for several moments with a curious interest, then said quietly, —

"Was there any trouble beside locking the door, and being lonesome?"

She colored a little. "I did feel indignant at that, perhaps unwisely so," she made answer, wondering if it was best to relate the other episode. Tale-bearing seemed so despicable to her. And, though Miss Grove appeared unreasonably severe, perhaps some check was necessary for Bertie. They might be different from most of the children she had seen: indeed, she thought they were.

"Because," said the doctor, still watching her, "that is not to happen again. The doors are not to be locked, except when we are both out. Only you must be a little watchful over my affairs."

"I promise. Is Bertie never to be allowed in here?"

"Isn't the rest of the house large enough for two children? I like to have one place sacred to myself."

"Very well. Oh! did you know that you did not give your list to Miss Grove? It is there on the table."

"How stupid! Why did you not help me to remember it? I wonder if Adelaide wrote out the invitations. I must call to her."

Miss Grove could not come down; but would Dr. Kinnard come up?

The invitations had been written, and sent. However, she would look these over; and she glanced down the list in dismay.

"It will not be at all select, if you mean to ask all these people," she returned haughtily.

"I don't care about the selectness. When I ask my friends, it is because I want them. But I would like to have the thing well over. It bores me thinking of it."

He was not as patient then as he had been with her. Nelly heard the words, and hugged a little secret joy close to her heart. It was just the transition, — the holiday laid aside, and the every-day life beginning; and she could not expect it to be adjusted all in a minute.

"God give me wisdom and grace," she prayed softly. "Let not all the golden years of my childhood and girlhood be without fruit for autumn."

CHAPTER VI.

“Men are made to be eternally shaken about; but women are flowers that lose their beautiful color in the noise and tumult of life.”—JEAN PAUL.

THE carpet and furniture came; and Nelly made her room a perfect bower. Some pictures were brought up stairs: she had her choice of them. She put up her brackets, and filled vases with flowers, until it quite reminded her of the rectory, except that it was more beautiful. She went at the “den” too, in a fragmentary, piecemeal way, straightening and retouching so by degrees, that her husband hardly remarked the change. Indeed, she was not ready for him to do so yet.

Then began the great party preparations. Jane was deep in the mysteries of cooking and compounding, and cross accordingly. Her sister, quite a young woman, who staid at home with their invalid mother, and took in sewing, came over to help. The house was opened, swept, dusted, and every thing beaten about as if it had the accumulation of a century in it. Mrs. Kinnard was giving orders here and there, quite in her element. The refreshment-table was to be arranged in the sitting-room, and the hall kept clear. Nelly smiled a little over the fuss and confusion, half of it quite unnecessary. Just a cold lunch at dinner, and then on with the preparations. And at dusk it all looked stiff and formal, and was quiet as the grave; for everybody had gone to dress.

Nelly had spoken once of flowers. Aunt Adelaide would make a bouquet for the table.

“But what I mean is to fill the vases, and stand them everywhere around.”

“They fall, and litter up the floor; and I think flowers in rooms very unhealthy,” was Mrs. Kinnard's reply, in no gracious tone.

The children had been very shy since Bertie's unfortunate episode, and Nelly had been busy; beside that, a secret sensitiveness which she did not want wounded. It was best to wait.

Edgerly did credit to itself and the wife of its favorite physician. Very few sent regrets. There was, no doubt, a good share of curiosity; and it was amply satisfied. Nelly looked her very prettiest in her light silk, — Stephen's gift. She was sweet and gracious, and perfectly self-possessed. A young thing, to be sure; but there would be years enough for her to grow older.

Miss Grove would fain have kept the reception select. She had a great horror of mixed companies; and, to her, “set” was every thing. It was not at all likely that Mrs. Kinnard would be guided by any one in her choice of friends, as she was a very headstrong young person. But Miss Grove could not resist explaining the position of a few of the guests.

They ate and drank, and congratulated their host. The women talked gossip in knots; and some of the men went into the office for a good comfortable smoke. The children remained up until ten, and were feasted no little, in spite of Aunt Adelaide's sharp eyes: at least, Bertie managed to abstract a good share. Nelly was a little shocked at the greediness. Maud was stiff and womanish, and showed herself quite capable of criticising her new mother, as there were not lacking ill-judging people whose curiosity had to be appeased.

But, somewhere about midnight, it was all over, to Nelly's great relief. A few guests who came from a distance were to remain all night; and the confusion

seemed so odd a thing in this house, that Nelly smiled to herself as she was drawn a little into the responsibility of providing for the comfort of others, in the capacity of hostess. It was destined to do a good work in this respect, — to open the way to her new sphere.

She stood in the hall the next morning, rather awkwardly waiting for all the family to assemble. Bertie's festive indulgence had taken effect in the shape of a severe attack of indigestion; and for once Aunt Adelaide was a trifle late. Was it a golden opportunity?

She touched her husband's arm. "Barton," she began softly, flushing as she spoke, "do you not think it time that I took the head of my own table? I ought not always to be considered a visitor."

For a moment he looked puzzled.

"Would you rather that Miss Grove kept it?"

"Why, no. I did not think about it. Yes, it is right. You are mistress of me and mine: so come."

Miss Grove swept down stairs at that moment, a little flurried. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting," she began; "but sickness is sometimes peremptory."

"You are scarcely five minutes behind, Adelaide; and it does not signify. I think, too, we will release you from a few of your duties; so that you may be able to feel more at liberty. Therefore I will install Mrs. Kinnard at the head of the table. She is quite old enough a bride."

Miss Grove was pale naturally; but an ashen hue overspread her countenance. They had chosen their time opportunely, when there were visitors, and when she had failed a little in promptness. It would be ill bred to contest the point; and, for the instant, she could think of nothing bitter to say, at least, that she dared say to her brother-in-law.

Nelly took her seat with a quiet grace, and poured the coffee. Two of the gentlemen fell into a discussion with

Dr. Kinnard concerning the property, and the improvements that had been made since it came into his hands.

"The credit being principally due to Mat," he said in a gay tone. "He is my right-hand man. He never bothers me with details, but goes straight about his work, and calls me to look at it when it is done."

"Is the doctor as liberally indulgent to you?" asked one of the ladies, turning to Nelly. "If so, I think I should remodel the house."

"What is there about the house, Mrs. Glyndon?" and the doctor glanced up sharply.

"Well, this great hall, for instance. It seems so much waste room."

"Oh, I like it!" cried Nelly hastily. "It has such an hospitable air."

"But doesn't it seem almost like eating out of doors? Now I should put in some sort of partition, and shut off the stairs, and make a snug little room."

"Little rooms are my abomination," returned the doctor. "And, since you can go up and down from the kitchen-way, and from the office, there is no great publicity in these stairs. They serve, too, to shut off this end from the hall-door. I shall not allow you to stir up Mrs. Kinnard to rebel against my hall. It is the apple of my eye, the one thing that decided me in buying the house. Now, if you could improve upon the rooms,—they are rather gloomy, I think."

"Mrs. Kinnard, don't allow this golden opportunity to slip. It is your time now; for husbands are more indulgent in the first six months of matrimony than ever afterwards."

"What treason!"

"Indeed, it is not," persisted Mrs. Glyndon. "Can't you have a bay-window put in somewhere? I have a mania for altering."

"As I know to my cost," said Mr. Glyndon. "I

occasionally wonder if it would not be cheaper to give her a course of study on architecture, and have her experiment on my neighbors. Didn't I hear of a woman once who built a house that was all closets?"

"But *ours* is not, I am sure. I want Mrs. Kinnard to come over and see it. And I have a lovely conservatory. You are fond of flowers, of course?"

"I have always lived among flowers," returned Nelly. "We used to have them in every room at home."

"Why don't we have them here?" said the doctor suddenly. "I like flowers myself. It always goes to my heart to see a solitary plant blooming on some poor woman's window-sill, or by the bed of a sick child. Nelly, Mat will be glad to cut them for you. They go to waste out of doors."

"And I shall be glad to bring them in, and cherish them a while. They add such an air of cheerfulness."

"But do you think them healthy?" asked the elder Mrs. Kinnard.

"I never heard that florists died any sooner than other people," said the doctor dryly.

Mrs. Glyndon began to relate some of her experiences in floriculture. She was very bright and entertaining certainly. The group sipped their coffee, and chatted, warming with the peculiar cordiality that lingering around a table invariably inspires.

Miss Grove rose presently, straight and severe.

"I am afraid Jane will think us exceedingly dilatory," she began, "our household generally goes on with such regularity; and you know a domestic, who has a great deal on her hands, feels the delay of an hour or two very sensibly. — Maud, you must go directly to your music. — Doctor, will you look at Herbert again, before you go out?"

Dr. Kinnard bit his lip; but there was a general dispersion. And then Mr. Glyndon found that he had some

business to do in town before he returned, and Mrs. Glyndon's trifle of shopping must be attended to; Mrs. Howard was anxious to take the next train; and the gentlemen had interests and employments.

"How do you manage with the dragon?" whispered Mrs. Glyndon slyly as she was tying her bonnet. "That woman would be the bane of my life. Do you know, we always fancied she would marry the doctor? and I said it would be a shame. I am half in love with him myself; and he deserves to be a very happy man. But I don't quite see how you are to manage comfortably."

Nelly gave a little embarrassed laugh, not knowing what to say in reply.

"Everybody's experience goes to prove that relations never do get along well together. I think it a pity to have them here."

"I should be sorry to find myself the cause of a rupture," Nelly returned a little coldly.

"Well, you may try; but you'll have to be very sharp if those two women do not out-general you. And you are such a sweet, attractive body, that I've taken a great fancy to you. Now, you will come to Melcombe, — it is such a pretty place; and the doctor has ever so many patients there. I want to show you my house. It is a perfect little nest, if I do say it; but then I've neither chick nor child to put me in disorder."

They all said their good-bys; and the doctor went out at the same time. He was in a mood of high good-humor. The social air of the party inspired him.

"And now every thing is to be cleared up," began Mrs. Kinnard fretfully. "Parties are such senseless things to me! You slave yourself to death beforehand; and, when you are all tired out, the whole house is to be put in order again. And Jane is as cross as a bear. She wasn't any too pleasant before; but loitering over meals always does vex her."

"I think we can soon restore the house to order," said Nelly gravely. "I have been used to both work and company all my life, and am not easily annoyed or discouraged. Would Jane like any help in the kitchen? Did her sister go home last night?"

"Yes; but she came again this morning. They are at the dishes now."

"It is not worth while to cook any thing fresh to-day. There must be cold ham and chicken, and there is enough, certainly. That will lessen the work somewhat."

Mrs. Kinnard stared hard at her daughter-in-law.

"Jane will do what she thinks best," was the reply.

An indignant flush flamed up in Nelly's face. If she dared to go out there, and be mistress of the kitchen!

Her own room was finished. She dusted the office and the adjoining room; then she opened the parlor-windows, and let in some sunshine. It was not yet eleven, and she might sweep both of these rooms. It was uncomfortable to hear everybody's fling about extra work, when any thing out of the ordinary routine occurred. At home no one grumbled. Cheerfulness reigned supreme.

She put on a loose sack and dainty sweeping-cap, and went down to the parlor. The furniture-covers were in the hall closet: so she took them out, tied them on, and began her work. No one came to disturb her. While she waited for the dust to settle, she attacked the sitting-room. Leaning on her broom, she took a survey of the apartment. If they could have it altered! If there could be folding-doors between this and the parlor, and the walls freshly papered with something different from brown roses and impossible leaves on a buff ground; and if there could be a bay-window toward the south, filled with flowers and ferns in the winter, a few pretty and convenient book-shelves, some easy-chairs instead of these stiff-backed mahogany ones, with uncomfortable mounds of seats, off of which you always slipped, — how home-like it would all be!

Then she went at her dusting, and soon had the rooms in the neatest of order. It had not been so very much, after all. Once or twice Miss Grove had gone up and down without a word. Nelly had an odd, guilty feeling, as if this had been in some sense a forbidden pleasure, a kind of interest that she had no right to take. So she ran up stairs, and brushed out her soft hair, making herself presentable, and none too soon; for she heard her husband's voice.

"How blooming you look!" he exclaimed. "Parties seem to agree with you. I was wondering if you would like to go for a good long ride this afternoon."

"Why, yes! I shall be delighted to," she answered.

"And glad to get out of the hubbub, I daresay. It will be nothing but clean and scold for a week."

"If guests make that much trouble, they would scarcely thank us for an invitation."

"I don't know how it comes about; but that generally seems the result. Have you looked in upon Herbert this morning?"

"I have not," said Nelly, coloring. "I have not been asked into the schoolroom or the children's apartments."

"Well, come along with me, then."

He put his arm around her, and led her through the hall. After a light tap on the door, he opened it. One corner of the apartment was fitted up with two small tables; but the rest was an ordinary sitting-room. Adjoining, the sleeping-chamber shared by Maud and her aunt, and a small one for Bertie, who was tossing restlessly on his cot, still with some fever symptoms.

Miss Grove bowed distantly, surprised at what she considered the intrusion.

The dinner-bell rang at that moment. Nelly bent over Bertie, and kissed the flushed forehead. He looked up with a sudden gleam of pleasure.

"O papa! mayn't I get up? I am so tired of lying here! And if I could come down to dinner!"

"Dr. Kinnard laughed. "You are better off here, my boy; and a little toast is all you can have to-day. Parties are quite too much for you."

"If you *had* listened to me, doctor," said Miss Grove in an injured tone, "the child would have been spared this. No consideration would induce *me* to keep children up beyond their usual bedtime; and such indulgences in diet are always injurious."

"Once or twice in a lifetime will not kill anybody. Bertie will be all right to-morrow. — I don't think you are looking especially well, Maud."

There was such a contrast between the blooming woman and the pale, dull-eyed child, that it startled the doctor.

"Maud is not out in the sun enough, Adelaide," said the doctor. "It is a shame to my profession, that my own children should be such poor exponents of health."

"Maud is always well; but she inherits a certain delicacy from her mother's family. And I cannot say that I admire high-colored women greatly. There is a degree of coarseness in the rude health of farmers' children."

"Humbug!" declared the doctor. "Be a good boy, Bertie. Come, dinner is waiting; and I must go to Kelly's Falls this afternoon." With that he whisked Nelly out of the room, and down the stairs, to find the elder Mrs. Kinnard in her place, the picture of neglected merit. Nelly was tempted to smile.

They ate silently, as usual. What a difference from the cheerful breakfast!

Afterward Nelly was standing in the hall, with her hat on, waiting, when Jane came in to remove the dishes.

"Jane," said Miss Grove, "can you find time to sweep the parlor this afternoon? I will come and assist you."

Nelly was astounded for a moment; then she stepped forward, confronting the two women, before Jane had resolved whether to be amiable or not.

"Both rooms are swept and dusted," she said clearly. "I surely had some right, in my husband's house, to restore order, seeing that I was the occasion of last evening's entertainment. I knew that Jane had already done a great deal of extra work."

"Since the parlor contains my sister's furniture, Mrs. Kinnard, and has reminiscences for me that it can have for no other, I prefer to take charge of it myself."

What Nelly might have said further, she scarcely knew; but she heard her husband's voice calling her, and left them to any discussion that pleased them best. But her heart swelled with indignation. Already she could see that Mrs. Kinnard and Miss Grove had resolved that she should have as few rights as possible in the house. They must have planned it before, or they could not have acted in such perfect accord.

"Well," the doctor said, after they had gone some distance in silence, "is the bay-window all settled in your mind? and do you see, by the eye of faith, geraniums blossoming in it?"

A bright color stole up into her face, and the serious lines relaxed.

"Would it be worth while to have such visions?" she asked with a smile.

"Well, I don't know. They are generally quite expensive. Still, if you did not take too many of Mrs. Glyndon's ideas, I might see about it."

"I planned it all myself as I was dusting this morning, Barton," and she placed her small hand over his driving-glove; but he felt the pressure, gentle as it was. "Will you be perfectly honest with me in one thing? Will you tell me if my ideas are ever too extravagant?"

He was very fond of his wife, foolishly fond; and, somehow, he felt in an excellent mood. There had been all along a fear in his mind, lest some of his friends might think he had made himself ridiculous by marrying this

pretty young girl. But he fancied, last evening, they (that is those for whom he cared most) considered him a fortunate man. And so he was. But he was possessed with a boy's eager desire, at times, to take her off to the fairy isles of love's first dreams, where they two might be alone together. He never told even her of this nonsensical idea; but it always gave him a mood of special indulgence.

"Yes, I will tell you. I ought to be a rich man for your sake."

"Why? I have never had riches;" and she gave him her most winsome smile. "I do not care much, I think. Only there are a few things that will make the place more homelike."

"The bay-window, for instance. Is it to be in the parlor?"

Then she began with her plans, which he declared excellent, and quite within his means.

"Adelaide will go somewhere in August, and take Maud with her: she always does. Then we will commence repairs and alterations."

Neither spoke of new furnishing; but it was strongly on the doctor's mind, and, along with it, the compunction of uprooting old ties and memories. If he had been happy in them; but every day he felt more and more how utterly barren that life had proved. And that gave him a peculiar tenderness,—the desire to do his duty justly and honorably when there was no love to inspire it.

He made his calls,—a long distance apart they were this afternoon,—and then they reached a lovely little nook, sheltered by a high peak on one side, with a cluster of twenty or thirty cottages at its foot. Up on the mountain-top was a spring that trickled over a rocky bed, broken many places in its descent, but at the last falling some fifteen feet. It caught the rays of the setting sun

through an opening in the trees, and gave back the most exquisite rainbow tints. All the banks were lined with rhododendron, now in its fullest bloom; and it seemed to Nelly that she had never seen any thing so enchantingly beautiful. The work was done; and they lingered in the sunset, watching the orange-red as it faded into rose and violet. A quiet summer evening was coming slowly on, calm, like all the utterances of God. Why was it that souls drifted away from him, trying to find peace for themselves, when it was freely offered at his hands?

They were late home, of course. Miss Grove was nowhere to be seen, Mrs. Kinnard was fretful, Jane sulken, as she brought in some hot tea. Without a word, Nelly cleared a little space at the head of the table brought up her husband's plate and two or three dishes.

"Sit here by me," she said in a quiet but tender tone, waiting upon him with the grace that had so won him in the quaint rectory.

"She can twist him round her finger," muttered Jane; "but she shall see that she cannot rule everybody else. I am glad Miss Adelaide has a little spirit!"

And Jane tossed her head, as if she might use hers on the very first occasion.

CHAPTER VII.

"If the round truth lie
Somewhere between us, and I see the face,
It turns to me in stronger light than you."—HOLLAND.

It seemed to Nelly Kinnard that there had never been three such long weeks as those three of her married life at Edgerly. Her husband was going to drive her over to the station now for her first visit at home. Late in the afternoon he would come for her; and they would return in the evening train together.

Papa was at the other station to meet her,—papa, sweet and smiling, and Gerty with a host of questions. Everybody was well, and longing to see her. They had missed her so much! Almost two months since she had gone away!

How delightful it was! She felt glad that no watchful eyes were there to see her first joy. She could run about in girlish freedom. What made this simple old house so much sweeter than the other, with its large rooms and really spacious grounds, its abundance of every thing, and the straitened income here? Could she ever fight against the great odds, and bring about some kind of homelikeness? She had not done any thing as yet, save to smile upon her husband, and be petted by him. Was that all of her duty?

She had been thinking, of late, whether it was better to rouse herself, or just float with the tide. Dr. Kinnard had married her entirely for himself. The children were

well enough off. Aunt Adelaide attended to their moral and physical welfare, and enjoyed it. She wanted no interference. Jane took command of the kitchen, and would brook no mistress or control there. Grandmother Kinnard considered herself, in another way, as the female head of the house,—partly in virtue of her age; partly from the fact that she was the doctor's mother, and had a longer and earlier right to him than any other person.

But as Nelly Endicott she had grown in a larger sphere. A little kissing and love, a few pleasant neighbors to come in and chat on the small gossip of the day, a ride with her husband, or a walk alone, and the day ending with chapters out of some interesting book—was that all?

“I think that is where so many women dwarf their lives,” said Mrs. Endicott in answer to some of Nelly's queries. “After a while, a new dress, or a bit of gossip, seems the great event of their days. It is so easy, then, to sink into a course of novel-reading for amusement, and live only in the highly wrought creations of some facile pen, forgetting, that, for the one exceptional life written out, there are thousands of commonplace, struggling ones.”

“Yet it seems so hard to begin! I have really nothing to do but just gratify my own selfish ease. When Fanny was married, she kept her church and social relations, and her sphere was widened. People came into it continually. And Rose found work enough. There was Stepher and Louis interested in mission-schools and chapels, and Mrs. Whitcomb to help”—

Nelly made a long pause, and flushed a little as her mother's fond eyes studied her. Perhaps part was due to that secret consciousness that both had thought of the same underlying current that would shape Nelly's life, if she did not resist, and put up some strong barriers. Dr. Kinnard was used to thinking of others only in a pro-

fessional or theoretical way. He could discuss the wants, mistakes, and failures of the age; he could be tender and watchful when physical life was in danger: but of the active, comprehensive charity which is the substratum of that most thorough human good, he had very little. He could tell you what to do; but he could not take the trouble to help. The labors of his profession were sufficient. The remainder of the time, he might surely devote to himself.

Circumstances had hitherto been against him, as well. There had been no delightful home-interest to stimulate and quicken the deeper part of his nature. Only petty matters had appealed to him there. He knew other professional men whose wives amused and entertained themselves while their husbands were at more important affairs. So he had come to think of home as a select sort of lodging-place; and if the house was kept clean and peaceable, the meals well served, it was sufficient. It had not always been so. Miss Grove and Jane had brought into his household more of order and regularity than had ever been it: so no wonder he dreaded to have their *régime* disturbed.

"Nelly," began her mother presently with a sympathetic smile, "perhaps your mission-work is from within. All are not called to go into the highways, or even the temples. There are wayside shrines in many lowly valleys. And, as in the creation, to every work there is its appointed day."

"I wonder if I am a little impatient? But, if I felt that I was doing ever so small a work, I should be more content. Really, mamma, I feel afraid of my temptation to idleness and listlessness. I realize the truth of the adage, that 'labor is worship.'"

"And that home is the central pivot. It is one of the misfortunes, Nelly, that your life should be taken on such terms: so you must look to other duties to counter-

balance it. The difficulties were there when you took it."

"Yes: I cannot plead being deceived in any point. But neither does it seem right to give up idly, to fritter away my days in uselessness."

"It is not right. Human life is too short."

"Then I must find some way out, and some duties. O mamma! how did you make your life so rich and full and outflowing?"

"It was not so all at once, Nelly. And then I had papa to counsel me."

Papa, who was then twenty-eight. Ah! it was not the years alone, but something finer and deeper in the man; and Nelly Kinnard had seen glimpses of it in her husband, long before he had become that to her. How did one get at all these deep and hidden things?—the precious stones on which every true soul builds its way up; for shifting sand never yet reared a stable character. She understood, then, the long years of study that were needed, the undoing of some other persons' work, just as it had been teaching Gerty to sew. It would have been so much easier to do it the first time herself; but there was given us in this world a good deal of second-hand work to do; with crumpled and frayed edges, and puckered seams. And, in gardens, how many weeds come up to one flower!

Then papa sauntered in, and looked at his darling with an odd, wistful expression, as if he was not sure how much belonged to him any more. She must see some new books in the study, and some new flowers in the garden; and there was the girls' room to inspect, with its pretty new carpet, and the picture that Fan had painted for the birthday of Queen Bess, as they had taken to calling her since she had shot up into such a tall, elegant-looking girl.

Then there was dinner, and, after that, Fan and the babies. And Nelly drove down to the station in the

Churchill carriage for her husband, who sat and studied her curiously all the way back.

He was in a very bright, jolly mood, and would fain have taken some of the numerous sisters home with them; but mamma was to have the honor of a first visit.

"If you like, Nelly, I'll ask Henderson to exchange with me; and then we can spend Sunday," said her father.

"Excellent!" returned Dr. Kinnard with a cordial shake of the hand.

Then he placed his wife in the corner of the seat by the open window, and seated himself beside her.

"Are you sorry?" he asked.

"Sorry for what?"

"That you are leaving the Delectable Mountains behind;" and a half-smile crossed his face.

"But the Delectable Mountains were not the last, nor the best thing in the journey."

"I am glad you think so, very glad;" and he gave her hand a fond pressure.

And Nelly Kinnard realized more deeply than ever, as they entered the quiet house together that evening, the magnitude of her work here, — to make a home, a woman's duty and province: it had never been a home yet. She was not to have the sweet and tender assistance that had been vouchsafed to both Rose and Fan. When there was peace in the house, Dr. Kinnard did not want it disturbed. So long as squabbles were kept out of his sight and hearing, the rest of the family might indulge in them twenty times a day. The little time he was in the house, he insisted upon having peace; and it had been every one's desire to stand well with him. In fact, the three women of his household had each adored him in her way, — his mother, because he was her only son, and had been, in the earlier part of his life, very manageable. Aunt Adelaide honored him, secretly, for his

patience with her sister; then he had the sort of half-imperiousness that sways women irresistibly. Perhaps, too, she had allowed herself to care as much for him as a woman of her temperament could care for a man before marriage; and that he should be foolish enough to choose a young thing of twenty, so liberally endowed with girlish prettiness, was another affront. Jane tyrannized over him in some respects, and was his slave in others. Every thing that could minister to his appetite was liberally provided. Meals at any time were no trouble, if they were for him; but she would hardly go out of her way for another member of the household.

Great had been the consternation when the proposed marriage was known to be a certainty.

"New wives make new laws," Mrs. Kinnard had said to her son. "I suppose, in my old age, I must seek another home. I did hope, Barton, never to have to separate from you again. If it had only been Adelaide, we could have gone right along, without any change. But a gay young girl, like Miss Endicott, will want her own friends and pleasures; and old people must be pushed aside."

"What nonsense, mother! This is to be your home as long as you care to stay in it, which I hope will be always. I don't see why two or three women in a house cannot agree."

"I am sure I should like to stay here while I live; and I sometimes feel that will not be very long. Our people are healthy while they do live; but none of them have reached old age;" and Mrs. Kinnard wiped her eyes pathetically.

He hated to see a woman cry: so he comforted her, and assured her that she would soon learn to love Nelly Endicott like a daughter.

Which might not have been so difficult a thing, after all, if Aunt Adelaide had not been there. The ready

affection of Nelly Endicott would have thrown out some irresistible tendril; for, at heart, she was not an unkind woman: but her son, certainly, had not inherited his self-reliance and sturdy independence from her. She had, too, a fatal facility of believing and mistrusting the worst; and her fears had been easily swayed by Miss Grove's strong and rigid mind.

"I consider it my duty to stay and look after these motherless children, who will have no real friend now but me. I have seen too often the influence a second wife gains over a man. She can persuade him into any line of conduct respecting his children. Second mothers are invariably jealous and envious—unless, as it sometimes happens, they are a connection of the first."

"If he had only married you, Adelaide!" groaned Mrs. Kinnard.

"I have no necessity for marrying *any* man," returned Miss Grove in her loftiest tone. "Miss Endicott, of course, feels differently. There are a host of girls; and their mother, no doubt, understands the art of getting them off her hands. Not that I blame the poor woman. Girls with no means of their own have no resource but marriage; while a woman who has an assured income can afford to be independent. My sister and I enjoyed this exceedingly. I do not understand how any woman can endure the thought of marrying a man for a mere support."

"And I daresay she is idle and extravagant," went on the elder. "If Barton *could* have seen! And now he has come to a time when he ought to be saving up something for old age. I wouldn't have thought he could be so short-sighted."

"It may not have been *all* his fault," said Miss Grove with stinging graciousness. "I am thankful that I have not a family of girls to settle in life; though I should endeavor to bring them up to something better than husband-hunting."

Thus discoursed the two women frequently, until the subject was varied by Nelly's actual presence, and her daily sins. That her room should have been refurnished, when there was so much furniture in the house; that she should go off, day after day, riding with her husband, and pay no attention to household affairs, except to litter up the rooms with foolish flowers, stamped their misgivings with the force of certainty.

And Nelly admitted to herself that she had not made much headway. Everywhere she was frustrated. The parlor was kept sacredly shut up, though it was not an attractive place to her. The piano was in Miss Grove's room; and, so far, she had not been invited within these sacred precincts. The children were kept studiously out of her reach, and they did not appear to care to venture within it. Now and then Bertie responded shyly to some demonstration; but untoward circumstances were sure to nip it in the bud. It was too early yet for neighborhood familiarities: indeed, the one or two people Nelly had ventured to admire appeared particularly obnoxious to Miss Grove. Yet there were no open hostilities: so Dr. Kinnard prided himself on his wisdom of waiting until both parties gradually fell into a friendly connection.

On this afternoon Nelly had taken a book, and rambled to the chestnut-grove, where she sat at the foot of a large tree, thinking, rather than reading, and raising her eyes now and then to the soft, floating clouds that moved through the interstices of waving grain. Occasionally a bird sang overhead, or a squirrel scampered through the dry leaves, pausing to peer curiously at her. Then another sound broke the peaceful stillness.

"I won't, either! I ain't going to mind a girl like you!"

"You will go directly into the house, Herbert."

Nelly could not forbear smiling at the authoritative tone, that, save in its youthfulness, was so like Miss Grove's.

"I tell you I won't, either. I always play in the afternoon. Papa said I should."

There was some sort of scuffle, and a sharp blow, followed by a scream on Maud's part. Nelly ran forward.

Herbert's cheek was still red with the print of his sister's hand. She had caught him by both arms; and he was struggling to get away, kicking viciously, which she adroitly tried to evade. Her dull eyes were in a glow of passion, and her usually pale face flushed with anger.

"Children!"

They both paused, and glared at her, instead of each other.

"Herbert must come immediately into the house," said Maud sharply, recovering herself the first.

"Why, Maud? I believe it is his papa's wish that he shall remain out of doors until tea-time."

"Aunt Adelaide wants him. He meddled with her bracelet, which was lying on the table, and broke it."

Bertie glanced up sullenly.

"I didn't break it," he said.

For a moment Nelly felt puzzled, as she looked from one to the other.

"Where was the bracelet, Maud?"

The little girl raised her eyes insolently, as if to question Nelly's right to ask, then answered, rather reluctantly, —

"In a box on the table;" but more briskly, "He had no right to touch it. He is always meddling. — And you'll get soundly punished too."

Bertie began to cry, and protest that he did not break it, he only just raised it up, and then put it back.

"You dropped it on the floor. Don't tell any more stories, Herbert Kinnard!"

"Hush, Maud!" said Nelly with a dignity that overawed her childish pretensions. "Tell me truly, Herbert, did you break it?"

"No, I didn't. I just looked at it, and put it back."

"It's no such thing! Aunt Adelaide found it on the floor, broken; and no one touched it but you."

"Maud, either return to the house, or keep silence until you are spoken to. — Bertie, had you not better go to Aunt Adelaide, and tell her just how it was?"

"No, I don't want to. She won't believe me: she never does." And Bertie began to cry with a perfect boyish uproar. Then, as if for greater safety, he buried his face in the skirt of Nelly's gown, and clung to it with both hands.

"My dear child," began Nelly soothingly.

"Why can't you, if you are my mother?" he interrupted, with a child's inconsequence.

"She is not your mother!" again exclaimed Maud sharply; for her wounded self-love had seethed to boiling-point. "Our own dear mamma is dead and buried; and she is only" —

"Only what?" and the clear eyes arraigned the child's bravado. But Maud was angry now. Under the calm and formal exterior, there was a depth of passion and temper that never found a vent, save upon Herbert.

"Only a stepmother" she said defiantly. "Because papa chose to marry you, it doesn't make you any real relation to us; and we need not love or obey you, if we don't want to."

"Who told you that, Maud, your papa?" Nelly asked gravely.

"Aunt Adelaide told her." And Bertie paused in his crying.

"Grandmamma said we could not be expected to love you," began Maud, taking up arms for Aunt Adelaide; "and I knew it myself without any telling. You see what Aunt Adelaide will give you! I shall go straight and tell her." And Maud made a sudden dash across the cleared space.

Nelly felt that a collision was inevitable. "Herbert," she began again, "will you not go in and tell Aunt Adelaide how it was, and that you are sorry?"

"I didn't break it! I didn't throw it on the floor! Maud tells lies to get me punished."

"How does Aunt Adelaide punish you?" she asked with some curiosity.

"Shuts me up in a dark closet; and I'm so afraid! And she snaps my ears, and won't let me have any supper. I'll run away, and drown myself in the river some day, and then I'll bet she'll feel bad!" And Master Bertie shook his head with a defiance that was ludicrous.

Nelly stood, with the child still clinging to her, undecided, with a kind of helplessness that was quite new to her, expecting every moment that Miss Grove would make her appearance. Instead, Maud again came in sight.

"Herbert, you are to come in, or Aunt Adelaide will tell papa as soon as he comes home, and you'll get an awful whipping."

Nelly turned, and walked with him. The child took a dozen or so reluctant steps, then, suddenly breaking away, ran in the opposite direction with the fleetness of a deer. It was an ignoble retreat, and most embarrassing for her; yet she could not help smiling.

Maud turned short about with a contemptuous expression upon her small face.

"Maud, come here," said Nelly.

"I am going in town with Aunt Adelaide," she replied over her shoulder, and hurried on.

"Very well, then. I will try to find Herbert."

She retraced her steps; but her search was in vain as well as her calls; and presently she returned to the house. Mrs. Kinnard sat at the farther end of the hall by the window, with some netting in her hand. Nelly thought she would go through to the office; but she paused

to make some trifling comment. The old lady's face was full of displeasure.

"Mrs. Kinnard," she began in a severe tone, "I am sorry that any thing unpleasant should have occurred about the children. We have all tried our best to live at peace. We resolved there should be no quarrelling on our part when you came into the house. But I must say it is very injudicious for you to interfere with Miss Grove. She has always had charge of the children, and they are her sister's. No one, of course, has the affection for them that she has; for a man soon forgets in new claims. Herbert is a very trying child, and needs a firm hand; and your unwarrantable indulgence makes it worse for him in the end, as your good sense must tell you."

Nelly's indignation threatened to master her for the moment. At first she could hardly steady her voice; but, when she felt she could trust it, she replied courteously,—

"I cannot forget that the children are also my husband's. In marrying him, I certainly did not lessen their claim to his attention. I have a right to exercise a mother's supervision over them; and I have not interfered, save in a childish quarrel which was not creditable to Maud or her instructress. The rest of the matter we will leave for Dr. Kinnard's decision. Even Miss Grove must allow that his right is first."

"I am sure I don't know what the children would have done without their aunt."

Nelly made no reply, but passed from the room. Once in the office, she threw herself on the sofa, and gave vent to a flood of hysterical tears, that carried off the nervousness, and left her calmer. Then she began to feel distressed about Herbert, and again sallied out, and sought Mat.

"The youngster'll come to light, never you fear," was his encouraging comment. "But I'll keep my eye out a bit."

If Dr. Kinnard would but return! Nelly waited anxiously, hoping to be able to explain her share in the matter before the family assembled for supper. But Maud and her aunt returned; and presently the bell rang. One glance assured her that there was no Bertie to be seen. She ran out, and intercepted Mat in the walk, questioning him eagerly.

“Oh, he is right enough somewhere! He will want something to eat, you may count on that.”

“Then you haven't seen him?” and now her face was pale with apprehension.

“Well, I didn't; but I know he will come to light. Every thing does; and children are no exception.”

“Will you go out and call in the woods again, Mat? He might be lost, or have fallen and injured himself. The doctor will be so worried!”

“He couldn't get lost; and his father has forbidden his going off the grounds. He's afraid of his father too, is that little chap. But I'll go.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“But he who says light does not necessarily say joy.” —
VICTOR HUGO.

THE women around the table looked exasperatingly patient as Nelly entered, much disturbed in mind and manner.

“May I venture to inquire about Herbert, Mrs. Kinard?” began Miss Grove, as Nelly was nervously pouring tea. “Since you have taken him under your jurisdiction, I suppose he is *safe*, at least;” and there was a little sneer in the words.

“I have not seen Herbert since — since he ran away in the grove,” returned Nelly tremulously.

“Of course you are quite prepared to answer to his father for whatever befalls him?”

“I will answer to his father as far as I am concerned,” she made answer quietly.

It did not seem as if any thing evil could happen to the child. It was still broad daylight; and he was used to roaming about. If Miss Grove believed him in danger, could she sit there so calmly? Maud wore the same look of insolent defiance that had characterized her in the afternoon. Nelly experienced a strange sinking about the heart, feeling pitted, as it were, against them in a cruel struggle.

“But it is unusual for the child to stay so,” said grandmother, with much alarm in her countenance.

“I have always insisted upon promptness; but then

I like regularity in all matters, and have accustomed myself to such habits. For years we have gone on in complete order; but I am no longer mistress, and therefore *not* responsible. Still, since I have consented to remain solely on account of these motherless children, my only sister's children, I do desire to do my duty by them without any interference. It was a very simple thing that occurred this afternoon. The child is meddling and destructive to the last degree, and I sent for him, as I had a perfect right to do; for I found he had broken my bracelet, and it was my place to punish him. You must see, Mrs. Kinnard, how utterly uncalled for your imprudent indulgence was in shielding him, and in thus enabling him to defy me. I think his father can hardly fail to say so."

Nelly heard her through with a quiet dignity.

"I did not shield him in any respect, Miss Grove. I should not have taken any notice of the matter; but he and Maud were wrangling in a very improper manner. I am not fully acquainted with your method of bringing up children. But in our family, where there was a much greater difference in regard to ages, one child was never allowed to strike another; and Maud had given him a severe blow."

"He kicked me," said Maud in eager justification.

"I think Maud will also bear me witness, if she cares to tell the truth, that I insisted upon his obeying you."

A dull blush suffused Maud's face.

"You had him in your lap, with your dress around him," the young lady returned with a most offensive self-complacency.

Nelly could have shaken her; for it flashed into her mind that Maud might not have repeated the transaction correctly.

"I am not much used to children's quarrels; and we were carefully trained not to misrepresent if it was ever

necessary to bear evidence against one another. — Will you be kind enough to tell me, Maud, what you said to your aunt? I shall take the liberty of repeating your whole conversation to your father: for I must say I considered it very impertinent in a little girl.”

“Indeed! Maud gives *me* no trouble that way. — Answer Mrs. Kinnard, Maud. You told me” —

“That — that” — and the child's voice faltered, while her eyes sought her aunt's with a sort of frightened entreaty.

Miss Grove generally scorned any thing like falsehood; but now her anger at Dr. Kinnard's wife was greater than her vaunted love of truth. Maud had most imprudently colored the whole transaction, and had said of her stepmother, “She won't let him come in.”

“That Mrs. Kinnard was his mother, or something of that sort, and he clung to her for protection. I suppose it was as much your manner that influenced Maud as any thing you said,” returned Miss Grove with a covert air of triumph.

“Did I tell him to go to your aunt, Maud, or did I not? Answer simply yes, or no.”

“I don't remember;” and Maud began to cry.

“She gave me the impression that you were shielding Herbert. But she was greatly excited, I must confess; and ordinarily Herbert obeys me.”

There was the sound of a breezy voice in the office; and Nelly's heart leaped with joy. He entered with a gay salutation, passed around and kissed his wife, noting with the quick eye of affection that something had discomposed her.

“Where is Bertie?” he asked as he took his cup of tea. “Dismissed on account of some meritorious deed?”

“Mrs. Kinnard was the last person who saw him, I believe,” returned Miss Grove.

“I will tell you after supper,” Nelly said quietly.

Dr. Kinnard glanced from one to the other. There had evidently been a storm; but he was most unromantically hungry, and thankful for Nelly's good sense. Then he had a message to deliver to his mother from a distant friend; and the conversation took a general turn.

Miss Grove rose when he was through. "Will you be kind enough to remain," asked Nelly, "while I make my explanations;" and the lady stood in a haughty dignity, with one hand on the back of her chair, her face curved with a scornful half-smile.

Nelly went briefly over the incidents of the afternoon. She did not repeat all Maud's insolence, for she did not desire to bring either of the elder ladies into personal conflict with herself; and she was by far too kind-hearted to thus mortify them in the presence of the son and brother.

Dr. Kinnard turned abruptly. "Where was the bracelet, Adelaide?" he asked.

"On my dressing-table, when I left it: on the floor, when I found it, and broken. I had been out of the room for a few moments."

"How I wish you would not keep gimcracks around where that boy can get at them, or, better still, *not* have him everlastingly in your room! I have told you a hundred times to send him out just as soon as his lessons were through. Is it badly broken? — Maud, go and fetch it. And he has not come in yet? Has any one sent Mat to see?"

"I have," said Nelly; for she could see that her husband was much annoyed.

"He hasn't spunk enough to run away, so never fear," glancing at Nelly's face of alarm. "And, if he did, he would run back again. I shall have to take him in hand, Adelaide. I have always said women could not manage boys."

"I am sure I have managed him until" — and an angry light shot out of Miss Grove's eyes.

“But now he is growing out of your reach; that is the truth. He must either be a molly-coddle (which no son of mine ever shall, if I can prevent), or there must be a different state of affairs. Ask Jane if Mat has come yet. Oh!” — for at that moment Maud entered with her aunt's bracelet, and handed it to her father, who examined it minutely.

“It has been trodden on,” he said. “I'll settle this matter myself, Adelaide; and, if the boy has told a falsehood, he shall be severely punished. I have a horror of children's lying. — And, Maud, you are not called upon to administer any correction whatever to Bertie. Did you strike first, or did he kick?”

“He — he struck me.”

“Keep your hands off him in the future,” said the doctor in a voice which strongly suggested obedience.

Nelly glanced at the pale, stolid face. Could she understand that her misrepresentation was absolute falsehood? or was she wrapped about with that terrible self-complacency which deadened all finer distinctions? Not a lovable little girl; and yet Nelly felt as if she wanted the doctor to take her on his knee, and talk to her until the cold and rigid little heart should melt. She could not quite approve of this hardness and indifference on his part.

“I have two or three prescriptions to compound: so I must go to the office. Send Bertie right to me.” Then, catching a glimpse of Nelly's sad face, he put his arm around her, and drew her in the office with him. But his departure was a signal for the loosening of tongues. Maud listened to the injudicious strictures of aunt and grandmother, which were not calculated to increase her respect for her stepmother, and felt how absolutely cruel it was of her father to thus transfer his love and interest to that young thing, as her aunt termed her, whose pretty face had caught his attention, while her own dear mamma was lying in the grave.

Dr. Kinnard compounded his two prescriptions silently, while Nelly sat and watched him. There were twenty things she wanted to say; but she knew he could not bear to be interrupted while he was engaged in any such matter. Perhaps the whole secret of his tolerating her in the office was, that she did not bother him with subjects foreign to the one he had in hand. Then he turned suddenly.

"Nelly, did you tell me all that happened this afternoon, — all that both children did and said?"

The question took her so by surprise, that she colored violently the first instant, and was silent.

"There was something else?" and he fixed his keen eyes upon her.

"I told you all that was necessary," she answered.

"But I want to know every word;" and, coming around the table, he sat down, taking both hands in his.

"I am not used to telling tales, or making complaints," she said almost haughtily.

"First case of insubordination;" and there was a shrewd half-smile in his eye, which hardly covered the persistent determination. "I am very sorry the incident should have occurred, Nelly. I hoped there would be no conflict until matters had settled into a somewhat comfortable groove for us all; but I understood from your face and voice that you were keeping something back. I trusted your judgment then: can you not trust mine now?"

Poor Nelly! The one thing she had strongly resolved not to do, was, to estrange the father from the children; to prejudice him in any way while his love for her was so strong and new. Maud's disrespect looked worse to her now than it had out in the grove; and, if she told it all, it must make Dr. Kinnard angry in her behalf.

"Oh," she cried with girlish eagerness, "let it all go! Let us think of Bertie, and what must be done. Little as I know about boys, this does not seem the right influence for him."

"One thing at a time. You have not answered my question. I want that first of all."

"I think you are a little cruel," Nelly said with spirit. "I do not desire to make any complaint. You must see how very embarrassing the position is for me."

"Let us get through with it, then. Come, be frank and honest with me. Don't you suppose that I realize the awkward position, that you are stepmother to these children?"

The tears came into Nelly's eyes; and she hid her face suddenly upon her husband's breast. "I will tell you," she said, "if you will promise not to be severe with Maud. They are your children: they have even a greater right to your love than I."

"Love! What foolish distinctions you women do make! Nelly, I hope I have sense enough to be just in any event. You are over-sensitive."

Nelly delayed no longer, but repeated the scene, leaving out, it must be confessed, a little of the worst. Then she glanced timidly up in her husband's face.

"Oh! I am not going to scold you," he said with a faint smile; "but you know, Nelly, that I have a great dislike of evasions, or, rather, understanding only part of a matter in which I am to judge. Maud is an insolent little vixen!" and, springing up, the doctor began to pace the floor.

"But you will forgive her this time, for my sake? Oh, please do, Barton! It would make it worse for me. She is Aunt Adelaide's favorite; and, if I brought her into disgrace with you" —

"There, there, Nelly! Don't go to crying about it. I will not say a word, if it pleases you better: in fact, I do suppose I should get myself into a hornet's nest. But Maud must not be allowed in any such conduct. You shall be respected by the children: of that I am resolved."

Just then there was a tap at the door; and the doctor opened it.

"I don't think Master Bertie is anywhere on the place," said Mat. "Would he have gone away, think?"

"Have you looked in the barn? You found him there once asleep, you know. Or, stay" — And he called up the stairway to Miss Grove, —

"Look in Bertie's room, will you?"

There was an entrance to this room from the kitchen part. While it was yet early, Bertie had stolen home, and hurried into bed. He was frightened and hungry; and, hearing his aunt's voice on her return, he had covered himself smoothly over. But, though she might have looked into his room under any other circumstances, she certainly had not done so now, until requested by his father. He was soundly asleep. Had his punishment been in her hands, she would have roused him in a moment; but now she only glanced at him with a bitter, self-satisfied smile, and went quietly down stairs.

"He *is* there, Barton. I suppose he was too guilty and ashamed to face any one, and had a dread of the punishment that he knew was sure to come. He is a very cowardly child. Shall I wake him up?"

The doctor thought a moment. "No: let him sleep. I will attend to his case in the morning. Tell Maud to come down to me."

Miss Grove bit her lip, and hesitated, then said, —

"Barton, she is very much excited, and in a highly nervous state. I think you had better defer any thing you have to say to her until breakfast-time. I was just about to send her to bed."

There was the least possible entreaty in Miss Grove's voice; but her brother-in-law did not heed it.

"I will not keep her but a moment or two. It is best for me to see her to-night."

Maud entered the office, pale and trembling. Her aunt had half a mind to brave all, and accompany her. But being requested to retire would have proved too great an

humiliation; and she knew Dr. Kinnard to be quite capable of such a course.

There was a look of sullen fear in the child's eyes; and her features seemed sharper and thinner than ever. Nelly felt really sorry for her.

"Maud," began her father, eying her with a half-contempt, "if you were at all disrespectful to your mother this afternoon, I want you to beg her pardon. And, in future, I want you and Bertie to understand that you are to obey her as promptly in any matter as you do me."

That was all, then. She hated to beg Mrs. Kinnard's pardon; but that was better than her having told all, and being in no end of a difficulty. So she collected her self-possession, and the certain obtuseness of feeling that so largely characterized her, and did as she was bid, in a formal way that was extremely annoying to Nelly.

"My little girl," she returned, compelling herself to speak kindly, "I hope you will soon begin to feel that I am your friend, at least. I know your own mamma is dead, and that is a great loss to any child; but I shall try to fill her place as well as you will allow me. I am ready to love you, and sympathize in all your pleasures and pursuits when you feel well enough acquainted to give me a share. It is our duty to try to make papa happy by our loving one another, as well as loving him. Will you try?"

Maud colored, and then became pale again, averted her face, and murmured a few indistinct words, turning toward the door. Then she opened it, said good-night briefly, and vanished.

The doctor went on pacing the room, with his hands folded behind him. Suddenly he broke out with, —

"It is not what you have been used to, Nelly. The elements of affection and kindness that formed so large a part in your household life are altogether wanting here. With all a man's solemn truth, I say I am sorry for it. But what to do" —

“Let me help you ;” and she slipped her hand within his arm, joining his walk.

“That was all a farce with Maud ; I saw it as well as you, but I was determined that she should pay you some outward respect. Nelly, the world has a great prejudice against stepmothers, and perhaps daughters-in-law. I think the matter is about evenly balanced. There are good and bad on both sides, just as there are good and bad husbands and fathers. Why, think of a man beating his poor little child, and sending him out on a cold winter day to beg for money to buy rum with ! Think how cruel Mat’s wife was to their little child ! And yet I am sorry that you must suffer in the world’s estimation for the injustice of other people.”

“But isn’t that just one of the things the Saviour commends ? What virtue is there in suffering patiently the result of our own faults ?”

“I don’t pretend to understand these things,” and he looked a little puzzled. “And I hate to have you prejudged, suspected of any thing so foreign to your nature. But I had my way in bringing you here : so I must endure the other with what grace I can ;” and he smiled grimly. “Aunt Adelaide would take nothing short of a positive dismissal, I fancy ; for she exaggerates her point of duty most heroically. Yet I think sometimes, if she managed the children differently, they might not be so — so unlike childhood in its natural state.”

“Can’t you do something for them ? can’t we both ?” cried Nelly earnestly. “It seems to me that they are not being brought up judiciously.”

“I don’t know how much I love children, whether I have any of that overwhelming passion that women indulge in ; but I have a great tenderness in some ways. I can’t bear to see a child abused or ill treated ; and — you’ll laugh at me, Nelly ; but I positively cannot endure to see a child beaten, so much of it comes under my

notice! Mothers are tried and angry, and worn out with their labors: so, when a child is troublesome or disobedient, a whipping settles it the quickest of any thing; therefore it is resorted to. Half the time, it is merely indulgence in one's own temper. I found out, a year ago, that Adelaide was in the habit of giving Bertie liberal allowances with a strap: so I took that away, and told her, when Bertie did any thing grave enough for such punishment, she must send him to me."

"And so *you* were tried frequently; was that it?"

On the contrary. She has appealed to me a few times; and Bertie has managed to commit some depredations in my office. I will candidly own that I can only strike a child in the heat of anger. There seems something so cowardly, so obnoxious, in the unequal warfare of a strong man pitted against a little child that he could crush and kill, and does sometimes maim. It may be necessary in schools, where a crowd of boys are herded together; but it seems to me there might be other punishments devised in a household, that would not injure a child in any way. But I cannot see that Bertie has improved much under the new *régime*."

"Yet I think he is a good deal afraid of Aunt Adelaide."

"That is true. There is something cowardly about the child, that annoys me. I like fearless, outspoken children, who are honestly sorry for a fault, and who, perhaps, forget the next day, and do the same thing. Adelaide is an excellent teacher; but I do believe the boy would be better off in a school with other children."

"He certainly would," said Nelly decisively.

"I promised Adelaide that I would make no change for the coming year; but I think I must. I want him to be manly, truthful, honest in principle; not that mere outward honesty that refrains from stealing your neighbor's coat or his money. And I wish—but here I am

shifting these burthens on your shoulders ; a thing I had resolved not to do."

"And why not?" Nelly stood up with a sweet bravery shining in her eyes. "Am I not to help in this work as well? Is it merely to take your love and service, and give nothing in return? I did not marry you for that."

He stooped, and kissed her. "I wish you had been their mother," he said huskily; "and yet you are such a child yourself. No, I must not make the burthen too heavy. I suspect I am something of a coward and a shirk myself," he appended grimly. "I ought to take the responsibility of my boy."

"I think you ought," returned Nelly gravely.

"But I had promised myself a sort of holiday household life," he continued with a shrug and a half-smile.

"Barton, life isn't all meant for a holiday. We have had a very bright golden one; and now I want you to let me help you with the work. Bertie needs a father's care and interest and love. Let him come a little more into your life. It will be a trouble, I know; but it brings with it a sweet reward. I wouldn't give up my remembrance of papa's sympathy and tenderness for all the wealth of the world."

"Mr. Endicott is a better man than I," said Dr. Kinnard simply. Then, with a smile, "I hope you have brought a little of his goodness with you to leaven us; for we all need it."

He sat down, and took her on his knee, holding the fair hand in his, and resting his chin upon it.

"What will you do with Bertie?" she asked presently.

"It puzzles me. The bracelet has certainly been stepped upon. Just falling from a table could not injure it in that manner. It seems as if Bertie ought to have told you the truth. And, if he should persist in his statement, Aunt Adelaide will not believe it I am afraid. So I am between two fires."

"You will not punish him, then, unless you are convinced?"

"Most assuredly not."

"I think we shall be able to tell. It seems to me that Miss Grove's method with him tends to make him conceal trifles, rather than admit them. She is strict and stern, putting him down continually, and finding fault. The child really has no freedom of ideas in any direction."

"Except mischief."

"And how much of this is due to unemployed resources?" Nelly asked with a smile. "I do think, Barton, a little judicious praise is ever so much better than repression and fault-finding. And I shall be so glad to have you take him more under your care."

"Well, we will see. There, let Bertie and his troubles rest until to-morrow."

She wisely said no more. He looked over a late magazine, and read her some extracts from a scientific article. Meanwhile she was thinking. What if this episode, beginning so uncomfortably, should open the door to the duties she had been longing for, and that wider sphere, the opportunity of bringing in a fresh current to the household so becalmed on the stagnant shores of formality and selfishness? And if she could render these children dearer to their father, and more worthy of his love, she would, at least, have achieved something that would justify her standing in their mother's place.

CHAPTER IX.

"The wheels of time work heavily:
We marvel, day by day,
To see how from the chain of life
The gilding wears away." — L. E. L.

BERTIE KINNARD came down to breakfast the next morning, ashamed, frightened, and sullen. How much of it was due to Miss Grove's previous lecture, and the methods she had taken to convince him of his heinousness in seeking shelter at his stepmother's side, and daring to disobey *her*, his father certainly could not know. A long list of punishments were held in store, small daily privations and trials. She always exacted the most rigorous justice.

"Come here," said his father after the meal was concluded. "I want you to tell me the exact truth about the bracelet. Did you break it?"

"No," was the brief reply.

"What did you do with it?"

"I — I looked at it."

"Here, hold up your head, so. If you are telling the truth, you need not be ashamed. What else did you do?"

Bertie glanced about uneasily, and picked at the buttons on his coat. There was a dogged look in his face, that betrayed a very persistent will, after all.

"I — took it out and looked at it, — and — put it back again," he said slowly.

"You are very sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well, Bertie, I am going to believe exactly what

you say. I do not think you could be so cowardly or so dishonorable as to tell your father a falsehood. There, put on your hat, and take a good long run, and see if you cannot find a pleasanter face."

"Barton!" exclaimed Miss Grove, while her brow crimsoned with anger, "you don't mean to say that you believe that child!"

"I said it certainly."

"Do you suppose I could have trodden on that bracelet (the theory you advanced last night), and not known or remembered it? Maud, I know, never injured it. And Bertie *does* tell falsehoods. He will deny any thing when there is the slightest chance of getting clear."

"I cannot explain the mystery, Adelaide. The boy would not be so hardened as to deny it without a blush surely: if so, it speaks badly for his past training."

He knew that clinched the matter for his sister-in-law. She turned almost swarthy in her passion, being deprived thus of her strongest weapon.

"Very well," she snapped. "If the child is ruined by your foolish indulgence, so let it be. It is what I told you a year ago. 'Spare the rod, and spoil the child.' I should have *made* him confess it."

"I am afraid I don't put as much faith in Solomon's wisdom as you do," said the doctor dryly. "His one son was not a very brilliant exponent of his father's theory, if I recollect rightly. We have had quite enough of this, I fancy. I'll take your bracelet into town, and get it repaired."

"Thank you. I can attend to it myself;" and she swept out of the hall indignantly.

"Well," said the doctor when his mother had left the room, "I suppose it has ended very unsatisfactorily. Still I couldn't think the child would persist in a falsehood; and I was anxious to have the matter ended. I have made Adelaide very angry. Have I pleased any one?"

"Bertie, no doubt. I have an odd feeling about it. I should hate to say that I was not convinced; and, in any case, you did the best. It is something to a child to be believed."

"I daresay Aunt Adelaide will make it up to him. However, she cannot abridge his playtime, nor give him a thrashing. Do you want to go out with me? If so, be ready in half an hour."

Bertie's school-bell rang ten minutes earlier than usual; and it always rang fifteen minutes before the time, in order to give him a chance to get in, and wash his hands and face before school-hours began. These few minutes were a great gratification to Miss Grove. Then Bertie had his ears snapped soundly until they were like a bit of red flannel. Boxing had been interdicted by the doctor. In fact, the whole morning was one continuation of sundry small and aggravated punishments, which made Bertie dull at his lessons, and perfectly vicious in his hatred of his aunt. If he dared to tell his stepmother! Wouldn't she take his part again?

Nelly had not been at all satisfied with the doctor's manner of examining into the case. The child had been disobedient to his aunt, ugly to his sister, and cowardly at the end of it all. But, seen in the morning light, the affair appeared trivial to his father; and he was glad to dismiss it with as few words as possible. However, she made no further comment. There was nothing small or nagging in her nature.

But that afternoon, when she saw Bertie cross the field on his way to the grove, she tied on her sun-hat, and followed him. When quite out of hearing of the house, she called to him. He watched her shyly at first, and did not seem inclined to be very friendly. But, after a while, he ventured to sit down beside her.

"Oh! what are you doing, Bertie?" she cried in surprise.

The child had a grasshopper in his hand, which he was rapidly dismembering.

"That is very, very cruel," she went on quickly. "Bertie, would you like to have some great giant come along, and pull out your arms and legs? Would it not hurt you?"

"There are no giants;" and he looked up triumphantly. "Aunt Adelaide said so. She wouldn't let me read about them, because it was not true."

"But there are men large enough and strong enough to tear you limb from limb. Look at that poor grasshopper. You have killed it. Are you not sorry? The poor little thing did you no harm."

"Well, it was only a grasshopper. It wasn't good for any thing."

"What are you good for, Bertie?"

The child hung his head.

"God made you; and he made the grasshopper also. Suppose papa was to say, 'Bertie, you are not good for any thing: so I will cut you up with some of my sharp knives.' How would you like that?"

"But he wouldn't," said Bertie confidently.

"No, he would not, because he loves you. And God wants you to love whatever helpless and innocent little things he creates."

Bertie was studying a knotty problem, and had not followed the last clause of the argument.

"Does he love me since he went to Wachusett, and married you?" he asked.

Nelly was startled and annoyed. She thought of Miss Grove's exceeding conscientiousness that the children should not witness their father's marriage; yet she had not hesitated to explain it to them, greatly in her disfavor. Her heart swelled with the sense of injustice. She realized that she must fight her way through prejudices and opposition, if she gained any thing. The

prospect of such bitter warfare was not pleasant. And much of it must be borne alone. She could not make Dr. Kinnard see the necessity of what she wished to do, much that she considered her absolute duty.

"Bertie, papa loves you just as well now as he did then; and he wants you to be a good and noble boy, so that he can love you better every day."

"But what did he marry you for, then?"

"That I might come here, and love you also. Your own mamma is dead, and I am to take her place, to show you how to be a good boy, and please papa. Will you not try to love me a little?" and Nelly's voice trembled.

But the question had no seriousness in it for him. He looked up stolidly, his mind intent on his own thoughts.

"Say," he began presently, "won't you make Aunt Adelaide let me have some supper when papa doesn't come home? I'm so hungry always."

"Were you hungry last night?"

Bertie hung his head, and looked ashamed.

"It was not at all brave, Bertie, to skulk off to bed when you knew you had been naughty. If you were telling the truth about the bracelet, you should have come in, and said to Aunt Adelaide that you were sorry for disobeying her, and begged sister's pardon for kicking her" —

"But she struck me," he interrupted. "Aunt Adelaide always lets her."

"But papa told her that she must not do so any more. If she should, you are to tell him. It is very rough and ungentlemanly to strike or kick a girl."

"I'll tell papa next time;" and Bertie shook his head with emphasis.

"And you will be kind to her, will you not?"

The child stared vacantly.

"And to the grasshoppers. It is wicked to be so cruel; and God does not love cruel children. Do you know who God is, Bertie?"

"God lives up in the sky. He sees all I do; and, if I am a bad boy, he will punish me everlastingly."

He said it like a lesson learned by rote, with no more real feeling than if he had been stating the commonest fact about the earth at his feet. Nelly looked at him in amaze.

"And are you not afraid of being punished?"

"I'm afraid of Aunt Adelaide. God can't come here and punish me; and I'll tell you what I mean to do," bending his head confidentially — "I shall be a big man then, and I won't go where he is. I'd like to run away from Aunt Adelaide."

"Why did you not last night? You had a good opportunity."

"Because I am only a little boy. I'll wait until I get to be a man. I'll see if she'll snap my ears then, and make me hold a big book so she can rap my knuckles. I'll kill her if she does!"

"O Bertie, Bertie!" cried Nelly, aghast. Poor little heathen! And this had been the result of his training. He understood fear and hate; but did he know the meaning of love? She would try him again.

"Bertie, do you love papa?"

"Yes," returned Bertie readily.

"What do you do when you love a person?"

Bertie drew a long breath, and thought for a moment; then wisely and truly answered, "I don't know."

"You try to please them; you obey them when they ask you to do any thing; you would never strike them, nor do any thing cruel to them, nor tell them a falsehood. Can you remember this?"

Bertie gave her a searching glance. He felt, somehow, that he had lost caste; and, with a child's eager vanity, he wanted to redeem himself.

"But I know my tables," he said, "and who all the great generals were; and I'm studying Latin. Cæsar

sonquered Gaul, and a great part of Britain. Afterwards the Normans went over with William the Conqueror: and, oh! I know all of the kings of England and France. Sometimes they have had emperors. And the King of Russia is called a czar. Russia is the largest division in Europe. Switzerland is the only republic;" and the child paused for a breath.

"What a purely mechanical being!" Nelly thought with a sad smile.

"Never mind," she said: "we will talk of other matters, though you have studied well, Bertie." And then she endeavored to rouse his mind into some kind of personal activity; but it was disheartening work. Miss Grove was no believer in filling a child's head with any thing but good, substantial facts. She snubbed and discouraged all curiosity on the part of a young pupil. Very methodical, very precise, cold by nature, she had no patience with the sentimental part of humanity. To dress well, and keep neat and clean; to behave properly on all occasions; to have the mind well stored with knowledge, the taste cultivated in certain respects; to be dignified and ladylike for a girl, manly and stoical for a boy,—she held the most necessary requirements of life. The children had known none of the caressing tenderness and sympathy that had been daily food to the Endicotts. Their mother consigned them to a nurse. Their father saw them but seldom; and he had not been a demonstrative man in those earlier years. Though they had been rather delicate, yet no dangerous illness had ever roused his anxiety concerning them; and, under Miss Grove's government, they were still farther removed from him. Nelly's first feeling about them had been quite true: they were not dear, naughty, sweet, delightful children.

No: there was nothing to call out the mother-love that glorifies so many women. These Endicott girls had been nourished on it,—first from their mother, and then the

habit each older girl fell into of loving and caring for younger ones, of playing mother, in turn. For a little while Nelly felt cold and sick at heart. Might she not as well let it go? The children would have all physical comforts, — be well educated, well dressed, make average people, no doubt, and be just as grateful to her as if she gave her very life for them. Their father did not bring her here for their comfort, but his own. And here was their aunt, who desired the sole charge. How easily she could slip off any responsibility!

But her duty! Was it not to bring into these pinched, bleak, and barren lives some of the sweetness and strength, the beauty and comfort, that had been put in hers, scattered all along her twenty years of richness and fulness? Perhaps that was just what God had given it all for, — so wide and delightful a kingdom! — that she might call in not only the charming, the refined, and those quick of sight and mood, but the halt and the blind, those by the great wayside, that, after all, comprehends so much.

At the very alphabet of love she must begin, and raise the ignorant, careless feet that would stumble so often. Bertie sat there studying the beautiful but perturbed face, and thinking, child-fashion, of himself.

“Couldn't you teach me my lessons?” he asked presently. “I'd try not to miss a word; and, if you wouldn't make me stand in the corner” —

“What do you do in the corner?”

“Why, I hold a big book, so.” And he jumped up, taking a broken stick in his hands to represent the book, which he held about on a level with his chin. “Then, if I don't keep it just straight, she cracks me with a ruler. It makes me so tired!” and he sighed.

Indeed, all manner of petty punishments had been invented by Miss Grove since the whipping was tabooed. Her rigid sense of justice must be satisfied in some manner.

"The best way, Bertie, is to be a good boy. Try to please Aunt Adelaide."

"But Maud tells on me always; and, when I tell on her, Aunt Adelaide won't listen."

Maud was evidently Aunt Adelaide's favorite. Bertie was too old and too sharp-eyed not to be injured by the show of partiality. Yet, if Miss Grove did not love him, ever in her rigid manner, why should she strive to keep him so completely within her influence?

Yet, in her way, Miss Grove was extremely conscientious. Her duty to her dead sister's children, — that was her watchword; and, undemonstrative as her regard for them appeared, she would have fought for them, if occasion required. She would have watched every sharp word or look from Dr. Kinnard's new wife, resented any thing like a show of authority, and made the children's interests paramount in the family, if she could. She even hated their father's interference. Already she was jealous of the young stepmother; and that was one reason of her great coldness. If Dr. Kinnard had gone over to the fair enemy, the children should not, without a great struggle on her part.

"No wife can love another woman's children," she had said to the doctor's mother. "They will not expect it. Poor things! It is little they will have of their father's affection, either. But I think it my duty to stay, and see that they are not unjustly treated. Nothing else would keep me here a day."

So she judged that she had a right to put the children on their guard, as she phrased it. How much of this bitter duty-work is done in the world!

But that evening, as Nelly Kinnard sat by her husband's side, talking over various small household matters, she said, —

"Barton, I do believe it would be better to send Bertie to school. He wants companionship. Does he never play with any neighboring children?"

"I really don't know. There are children about. I have been thinking of it myself to-day. I like boys to be boys. They are to fill men's places in the world, not women's. But Adelaide would feel dreadfully vexed about it."

"I suppose there are no good day-schools nearer than the village?"

"Oh!" the doctor said, with a nod or two. "I had thought of boarding-school."

"But he is so young! No: I should not like to have him sent away from home,—this year, at least;" and she colored delicately.

He inferred her reason, and respected it. "There are two or three excellent schools in the village. He could be taken in the morning, I suppose. But I don't always go in one direction; which makes me think, Nelly—how would you like to have a horse of your own?"

"Oh, delightful! And yet I always go out with you."

"But some time the girls will be here, I hope; or are you keeping them away out of pure jealousy, Mrs. Kinnard? I do admire Queen Bess exceedingly. Well, then, you would like to have a separate establishment of your own?"

"How good you are to me!"

"Am I? No doubt but that I shall be a stern tyrant in the course of a few years. You had better make your hay during this fine spell of weather."

"Barton," she said a little shyly, "I had a reason for putting off the promised visit. You said Miss Grove always went away in August."

"Exactly. We should enjoy ourselves better, I think. Only the house is to be altered then."

"I shall not mind that. There is so much room beside! And I don't believe you would mind our using the 'den' occasionally."

"Well, that is cool too. I don't seem to know the

place any more. What with your tidiness, your flowers, and your changes here and there, I am almost afraid to set down my old boots in a corner when I come home tired."

"You may, for all that;" and she laughed gayly.

"What were we talking about? Oh! a pony. I think I will keep a lookout for a suitable animal; for I should find it a convenience myself."

"And I could take Bertie to school. It will be ever so much better for him!"

"Let me see: why, this is the last of July! Adelaide has not said a word as yet;" and Dr. Kinnard looked at his wife in the utmost surprise. "I have spoken to Bailey, too—gave him that plan of yours; and he is to drop in some day to take dinner with us, and then view the premises. But I do hope Adelaide goes away."

"You will speak of it, though?"

"No. Why should I? She will advance twenty good reasons why it should not be done; and I shall have to combat each one singly, and the whole in a lump. I hate women's arguments;" and a little frown settled between the doctor's eyes.

"I am afraid she would think it— And, if the furniture was injured"—

"I wish every one of those things was out of the house!" cried the doctor testily. "Nelly, I am thankful that you haven't any money, and can't buy so much as a salt-cup. I have heard about them all my life, and am likely to hear until I fall into my dotage—unless I make a bonfire of them."

"But that would be a matter of courtesy,—speaking, I mean. Miss Grove is very choice of the parlor, and feels that she has a prior claim. She might suppose it—my idea;" and Nelly paused in a flush of embarrassment.

"As if it wasn't!" said the doctor banteringly.

"But you know, Nelly, how I hate fuss and long arguments."

He was evidently bent upon having his own way, and she said no more. If she had found a weak side to her husband, this was it. It was no real lack of moral courage, but the putting-off of an evil day, — a species of procrastination that peace-loving people indulge in frequently.

The first of August came in. Vacation began for the children, though it could hardly be called that. Aunt Adelaide was strict about the music practices, and questioned Bertie every night concerning the summer's lessons. During the past fortnight, he and Nelly had made some very faint advances; but Aunt Adelaide's eyes were sharp. Then the pony and a new phaeton came home, and he was promised a ride.

And then happened a most unlucky *contretemps*. Mr. Bailey "dropped in," according to promise. Dr. Kinnard was expected home, but did not come; and they sat down to dinner promptly. If Nelly could have summoned sufficient courage to beg of him not to mention the alteration; but it seemed small and underhand. So she exerted herself, and was so entertaining, that she led the worthy man completely away from business until there was a lull during the dessert.

"I am sorry the doctor stays so," he began suddenly. "You think he will be home presently, Mrs. Kinnard? I wanted to discuss his new project with him, and get to work next week. I liked that plan of yours ever so much; for it strikes me those rooms are gloomy;" and he turned his head to take a survey. "But why not have a small room there at the back for flowers, instead of a bay-window merely?"

Miss Grove fixed her eyes upon Nelly with a sort of astonished deliberation that called the color to the fair young face.

"I don't know," she stammered rather hesitatingly. "As the doctor fancies."

"Of course, of course! we bow to his decision;" and Mr. Bailey gave a cheerful smile. "I wonder that he never had folding-doors cut through there before. It looks so much more sociable, and is convenient in many cases; such as a large company, for instance. Really, Mrs. Kinnard, your coming will work a great change in the doctor. He was making quite a hermit of himself. Doesn't the good book say it is not good for man to be alone?"

"Though it can hardly be said that Dr. Kinnard was alone," was Miss Grove's pointed rebuke.

"Well, no — not exactly;" and Mr. Bailey gave a rather uncomfortable laugh. "But then, you see, Miss Grove, no one is quite like a wife to a man."

"Herbert!" cried Miss Grove sharply, "you are eating with your spoon. Take your fork, sir!" and she straightened up her tall figure with a severe air.

Mr. Bailey pushed back his chair. "Yes," he continued, "I am right sorry the doctor is not here; but I suppose you can tell me the particulars all the same. A good wife and a good husband generally agree;" with an effort at geniality. "If you wouldn't mind taking a survey of the rooms with me, and making any suggestions. I shall be likely to come across the doctor in the village afterwards."

Nelly rose, and marshalled him through. If it only had not happened in this manner!

Mr. Bailey took measurements, sounded the walls, and made sundry business-like comments. Then he examined the place for the bay-window.

"Yes, it is just as I told the doctor. You see, the kitchen runs out here in a jog; and that is going to make a bad shade for one side of your window. Now, if this was a kind of extension, instead, the end all glass,

and shelved, you see. And this window might be changed to a door, giving you an entrance, and a pretty porch, here on the west side."

"That would be convenient and delightful." And Nelly's eyes were aglow with pleasure.

"That is what I should have, if the house was mine. You will like it, I know. Now may I see the parlor?"

Nelly looked helplessly at Miss Grove a moment, then opened the door in great fear and trembling. It was the first time she had entered the place of her own accord. It seemed to be kept sacred to the memory of "my poor dead sister," and embalmed with sighs. The tight shutters were always tightly closed, except at the weekly dustings. It was dark as a prison now, and she groped her way, stumbling over an ottoman; but, after much exertion, she managed to get a ray of light.

"Yes, you'll find folding-doors a decided advantage, so much more cheerful. It will be a great improvement, — a very great improvement. Just talk it over with the doctor: we surely ought to be able to convince him. Tell him how sorry I was to miss him."

And so on, until Mr. Bailey had talked himself out of the parlor, and out of the hall, expatiating in his most convincing tone upon the benefit the alteration would be, and at last wishing her a hearty good-day.

CHAPTER X.

How happy is he born and taught,
That serveth not another's will,
Whose armor is his honest thought,
And simple truth his utmost skill. — WOTTON.

NELLY KINNARD turned with a flushing face toward the two women who she knew were sitting in judgment upon her. Bertie had been dismissed; but Maud was standing by the window with her self-complacent smirk.

"Mrs. Kinnard," Miss Grove began with asperity, "may I venture to inquire the meaning of this business? Is the one room that I hoped could be kept in some degree sacred to the memory of 'my poor dear sister,' for her children's sake, to be turned into a common thoroughfare? My brother-in-law has given you his office for a sitting-room" (and this was uttered spitefully); "yet it seems you are not content."

"And what did he say about that window?" exclaimed Mother Kinnard. "It is the only spot on this floor where I sit and sew. It has been *my* window ever since I came into the house. But, Adelaide, we are of trifling account now. Our years of care and devotion can go for nothing."

Miss Grove made a lofty gesture, as much as to say, "Your years of devotion — what are they compared with mine?" Then, confronting Mrs. Kinnard, she continued in an injured tone, "At least, I might have had sufficient warning to remove my poor dead sister's furniture. That belongs to her children. It was bought with *her* money."

"I have no doubt Dr. Kinnard will make ample arrangements for every thing. He has spoken to Mr. Bailey about some alterations; and, when he has decided, he will no doubt inform you," Nelly said quietly, and would have passed on. But Miss Grove did not mean that she should escape so easily.

"You are very innocent of the whole thing, Mrs. Kinnard!" she retorted scornfully. "Mr. Bailey spoke of the plan being yours. I have made it a rule of my life to set an example of truth—before children at least," and she glanced at Maud.

"We have discussed it together, Miss Grove; and I did plan a bay-window for some flowers. Dr. Kinnard is to settle the matter as he chooses."

"And a sweet penny it will cost before you get through!" cried the elder lady. "I suppose the whole house must be refurnished, and changes upon changes! My son is not a rich man by any means, Mrs. Kinnard."

Nelly's blood rushed to her heart tumultuously, and her face was scarlet with indignation. Yet she would not be drawn into a quarrel with either of these women: so she made great effort at self-control.

"You will have the same right to discuss the matter with Dr. Kinnard that I have," she returned with dignity. "If there are any complaints, make them to him." Then she passed by the irate sister-in-law, and almost flew up stairs.

She heard the tongues long afterward. Why could they not concede gracefully that she had some rights in the house, since they knew well that they could not drive her out of it by any amount of opposition? The little sneers and invidious comments were bad enough, and often stung her sorely; but open quarrels she considered disgraceful. She had a pride, too, about not being drawn into them. The neighborhood should not feast over the fact of the "Kinnard disagreements," if she could help it.

The whole afternoon passed, and no husband. She had not even the heart to try her pony. Did they grudge her her husband's gifts? It would seem so; and yet both women were blessed with an abundance of their own.

He came at last, tired out, and a little cross it must be confessed; and he dropped down on the great lounge with only a brief word or two, and laid there until the bell rang for supper.

"How pleasant it is to have you here, Nelly!" he said then. "I used to think I would never be able to endure a woman about my office; but I really believe you improve it, you dark-eyed gypsy. What has happened to-day? Been to ride, or had any letters?"

"Neither. I sewed all the morning. But come, or we shall keep supper waiting. After that, I want a talk with you."

He kissed her fondly. He did love her very much; and she suddenly felt strong again.

The supper-table atmosphere was not a genial one. Bertie was very unfortunate. Nothing but his father's presence saved his being sent from the table. Nelly's heart swelled with a sense of injustice. Once Dr. Kinnard said rather shortly, "Adelaide, the child would do better if you did not badger him continually."

Miss Grove raised her head with a most exasperating, martyr-like endurance, but, for a wonder, did not reply.

"Well," questioned the doctor when they were again alone, "are you going to scold because I absented myself all day? I really could not help it, I assure you. And I met Mrs. Glyndon at the house of a patient. I am to take you to her house to dinner to-morrow."

"It will be very entertaining to go," said Nelly with a smile.

"Yes. What a talker that woman is! Her head is crammed full of 'isms' and 'ologies' and quips and quirks. She should have had half a dozen babies!"

"Mr. Bailey was here to dinner," Nelly ventured in the pause.

"No! Was he? Did he talk business?" And there was an amused twinkle in the doctor's eye.

"Yes. Your mother and Miss Grove were very much surprised," she answered in a low tone.

"And there was a declaration of war afterward? I can just imagine how the avalanche descended on their devoted heads. 'Twas ever thus from childhood's hour.' I believe I never undertook any thing without having to fight my way through a storm of women's reasons;" and he gave a low laugh.

"It was not at all funny to me," exclaimed Nelly in a grave tone.

"They surely did not dare" —

"They were indignant, and fancied that I was at the bottom of the concealment."

The doctor indulged in a prolonged whistle, though Nelly's face made him feel rather conscience-stricken.

"My dear girl, I ought to have explained: that is a fact. But I thought to be here, and I hate so much talking about a thing. Surely a man of my age has a right to have some voice in his own house. But I will have it settled to-morrow; and, Nelly, if you want a bay-window in every room in the house, you shall have it. Come, tell me what was said."

Nelly repeated a little of the talk, while her inmost soul made a protest against tale-bearing. But, after all, she should only lose by keeping silence. She could not touch the hearts of either of these women by the most heroic self-abnegation. They were determined to reduce her sphere to its smallest compass. If they would attempt it openly, before her husband. But they stood in awe of him; and she had to suffer in a dozen underhand ways. Could she go on doing it, and keep her grace, her sweetness, her patience, the household virtues that had been cultivated in the home of her girlhood?

Could she do it? Why, was not this the very work of life? What did it avail to be charming in temper and moods when the whole world was brilliant with sunshine, and glowing with tenderness? The Saviour had said, "My grace is sufficient for thee," why, then, should she doubt? Was it not for such times and seasons that it had been promised? And there stole over her face a soft half-smile. He would keep her safely.

"What is it?" and, coming around, Dr. Kinnard took his wife's hand in his, and stooped to kiss the soft lips as he seated himself beside her. "What lighted up your face in that lovely glow?"

She flushed a little, and her eyes drooped.

"I don't know as I can quite make you understand," she said with a touch of hesitation. "I was somewhat discouraged at the thought of my own weakness; and then came to me a glimpse of the other strength. If I can keep clinging to it when I feel cross and impatient and troubled. If I can keep in the midst of the blessedness given out daily, and then give again, as I have received. O Barton! I do hope I shall be a good wife to you. I always mean to."

"Good! You are like a little angel!" he said with a voice that had something in it like a forced laugh, lest the undercurrent of quiver should betray itself. And yet he was strangely touched, moved in a way that he would have been ashamed, in his man's fashion, to explain.

He righted himself at the breakfast-table the next morning.

"I am going to have the house altered a little, Adelaide," he said, turning to Miss Grove. "Are you going to take a summer vacation? If so, I will wait until you and the children are away, as it will make a rather troublesome time during a week, at least. Shall you go to the seashore?"

"I really have not decided," returned the lady indifferently.

"The work will be down here on the parlor-floor, and not interfere with the sleeping-rooms. I shall have folding-doors put in between the rooms, and some kind of a place built out at the southern end.—Nelly, I think that idea of Bailey's, about a porch there, was excellent."

"I don't see what you want to tear the house to pieces for, Barton," said his mother peevishly. "It is good and substantial, and there is plenty of room in it—at least, there always was. And that south window is my favorite place."

"There will still be windows to the south, and favorite places, all the same."

"But, if you are going to put flowers there, I can have no good of it at all. Flowers *are* unhealthy. I should think you, being a physician" —

"But recent scientific facts have shown that flowers *are* healthy, even in sleeping-rooms. And there will be all summer when they are out of doors. I want the place brightened up a bit, and opened occasionally. I never did like the shut-in feeling those two rooms give any one."

"But it always was good enough."

"Was it?" rejoined the doctor dryly. "I think I have heard a deal of complaining in my day."

Both women remembered, sorely against their will, that nothing about it had ever suited "Mary."

"I suppose you mean to furnish anew?" said Miss Grove loftily.

"Well — really — I had not thought about that," was the rather slow answer.

"I have endeavored, since my poor dear sister's death, to keep her furniture as nicely as possible. Maud will be grown up, some day; and the articles may have a sacredness for her that they fail to keep for any one else. And I *do* object to having the parlor made a common thorough-

sure. It always seems decidedly vulgar to me to have every thing in a glare of light and shabbiness."

She had gone a little too far. There was an ominous sparkle in the doctor's eye.

"I suppose the house is mine, if the furniture is not, Adelaide," he returned in that intensely quiet tone he used when he meant to speak but once. "If you prefer keeping it for Maud, I am quite willing. I would much rather furnish anew. There is a nice room up in the attic that you can use for storage; and in future there need be no fears about opening or using the room. I intend to see Bailey to-day, and want to begin the first of next week. Mat shall be at your service in carrying up the furniture, or any thing else you need."

The scarlet blaze of anger had died out of Miss Grove's face, and an ashen pallor of hate succeeded it. It was not *her* house: she was here on sufferance only. Easy and indulgent as Dr. Kinnard had been in most household matters, she knew it would not be wisdom to try him too far. If she were dependent upon him, he would think some time before he could summon sufficient decision to turn her out homeless: but she had not even that claim on him, and she meant to stay. Aggrieved she was by the fact of this second wife; but her duty to her poor sister's children gave her courage to surmount any unpleasantness.

"Very well," she returned with a bitter emphasis. "I can never forget that Maud's mother chose every article there; that it will always have a peculiar remembrance for her. I will pack them safely in the garret."

The doctor winced a little; yet in his secret heart he felt relieved. That furniture had been the bane of his life; and he was glad to get rid of it with no greater fuss. It did seem rather disgraceful that every reminder of his first wife should be stored in a garret; and he was half ashamed for the moment. Yet it was a fact that he was obliged to face and abide by: there could be no imme-

diate softening of it. The world at large, propriety, and even his sister-in-law, could not justly complain of any disrespect he had shown to Mary Grove's memory. As for that rubbishy, faded red furniture, he could not get up any warm sentiment over it.

Nelly sat there with a burning face and beating heart, thinking it hard to be crowded out of love and remembrance when one had come to dust and daisies. But Mrs. Kinnard broke the awkward silence by saying, —

“Barton, have you thought how much this is all to cost? A man at your time of life, and with a family around him, ought to consider a little.”

“I have considered,” very briefly; for the end of his patience was almost reached. “If I should happen to ruin myself by this experiment, the children will not be left penniless. As for my wife, if we have to be sold out by the sheriff, she and I will try love in a cottage with a crust and water, and — peace. — Now, Nelly,” and he rose, “you will not have a great deal of spare time. I want to start pretty early; for I have a long list of morning-calls before we get to Melcombe. Business seems to be rather thriving. I am not quite on the verge of bankruptcy.”

“Barton has certainly lost his senses!” And Mrs. Kinnard began to cry when they were within a safe distance for such a proceeding. “Set a beggar on horseback! A poor minister's daughter, and nothing good enough for her! And I never could endure that Mrs. Glyndon.”

“A very underbred and superficial woman. But, my dear Mrs. Kinnard, we may be thankful to be allowed to stay on any terms. If it were not for my poor sister's children, I should go as soon as I could pack up my clothes.”

“But he is all the near relative I have now; and it would be very hard to be separated from my own son. Though I am not beholden to him. I have enough of my

own; and I am resolved that it shall go to poor Mary's children, when I am done with it. Not a penny shall they have to waste on their foolery," she flung out vindictively.

"I do think it your duty," said Miss Grove. "These children are dearer to you than any others can ever be. It is fortunate there is some little provision for them."

"If he could have chosen sensibly, as he did at first. I can never forgive them for dragging him into such an imprudent marriage!"

Maud sat drinking in every word. She had quite too much of that narrow-minded, precocious wisdom, and, even thus early, felt elated at the thought of her own fortune. Bertie, not being interested in this strife of tongues, had gone around to his father's place, and was regaling himself with the second cup of coffee, which the doctor had left untasted; and had swallowed it nearly all before he was discovered.

"That child gets worse and worse every day!" declared Miss Grove as she snapped his ears viciously. "If I could have him to myself; but *she* will interfere, and she knows no more about bringing up children than a cat. You'll have nothing for your dinner but a piece of dry bread, Master Herbert, remember that! Go straight up stairs, and practise your music one hour. — Maud, keep watch of him, and report the slightest inattention."

These music practices were a sore punishment to poor Bertie. He had no ear and no love for music. Every mistake was followed by a rap over the knuckles, until he had come to hate the sight of a piano.

Nelly put her room in order, and then donned one of her simple gray dresses with a thoughtful air.

"Barton," she said, when they were comfortably seated in the buggy, "I want you to tell me one thing truly. The cottage and the crust have no terrors for me;" and she smiled amusedly. "I have never been at all rich. I

even think I could do my own work, and enjoy it, if the house were not too large. Can you afford all this" —

"Tremendous luxury and expense?" and he laughed good-humoredly. "Yes; I may safely say that I can. You are my wife, Nelly; and you have a right to know just how matters stand with me, — if you care."

"I certainly do," she made answer.

"It is odd; but I have never been in the habit of explaining my own affairs to any extent. I can't endure questioning, as you have no doubt discovered; and I don't enjoy many comments. But you are a wise little woman, and have hit the happy medium between curiosity and interest. I would rather tell you, for another reason. My mother has reached that period of life when she begins to think of coming to want;" and he smiled humorously out of his eyes. "You may chance to hear comments that would trouble you, if you did not know. The place is clear. I am owing no debts; and have a comfortable income, — three thousand or so a year. Not a rich man, by any means; and I am afraid I have no real ambition to be one. I should like a few enjoyable years before I die; but the happiness that I want is not altogether that which money brings. I have a little beside, for a rainy day, and provision made when death overtakes me. Can we not jog on together, and enjoy our daily bread, without vexing our souls about the iced fruit-cake for to-morrow?"

"We can and we will," responded Nelly with a bright glow.

"Jane, I find, manages household matters much better than they were ever administered before. That is one reason why I have not allowed any general interference. And now for the rest. I can amply afford the few hundreds this alteration will cost; also the new furniture, if your ideas are not very extravagant."

"I will endeavor to moderate them," she said with a cunning little smile.

So they jogged on and on, — past knolls of maple, birch, and elm, or chestnuts, now in brown bloom, evergreen coverts that were shady and deep, bits and flashes of the winding river, bits and flashes of the blue sky overhead. Here a squirrel ran out; there a bird sang, or a great waft of odorous sweetness crossed her path, blown from the countless shrubs and flowers. She took it all in, — the freshness, the abundance, the changeful beauty, and thanked God for it, for the chance of getting away from the narrow boundaries of care and fret.

“I do not wonder a man’s world is broader than a woman’s,” she said presently: “he has the whole wide out-of-doors.”

“And she has the extra ruffle on her neighbor’s gown, and the new pudding with one more egg in it, dancing continually before her vision. I wish I could persuade some of these poor tired mothers to put a clean calico dress upon their children, and go out to the woods for a whole long day. John could get his own dinner for once. There are so many senseless things in the world; and it is often quite useless to doctor bodies, when the disease is in the mind.”

And so chatting off and on, bits of talks laid between the thought and the enjoyment, remembered afterward like the scent of sweet-clover laid among linen. Now and then she held the reins, while he went in for a call, and gave him a sweet smile of welcome as he came out. She was so companionable, that was it, — not merely the loving, or the being his wife, but that peculiar adaptiveness so delightful when one does meet with it.

He was loath to leave her at Mrs. Glyndon’s after dinner; but he made a little jest of it, and went away. And there she was in an enchanted house, with a woman who had been blest with nearly all of this world’s gifts, — health, wealth, beauty, taste, education, refinement, and, in a certain way, genius; a fascinating woman, moreover,

who had travelled and enjoyed, who was witty, satirical, daring, and sweet enough when she took fancies, as she had to Dr. Kinnard's young wife.

She questioned her a little about home-matters, delicately, it must be confessed; and was rather free in her comments upon Miss Grove. Nelly felt half inclined to make a friend and confidante of her; and yet she shrank from admitting any family grievance outside the walls of home.

When they returned, they found the parlor despoiled, and the shutters thrown wide open. Everybody was quiet and sullen, and chilly as a November morning.

And the next day Mr. Bailey came over again, and plans were redrawn for porch and extension. Work was to be commenced immediately. Madame Kinnard grumbled about the expense, and fretted about her window, and wondered if there would be room for anybody in the house presently. Miss Grove said nothing about going away. The doctor went to Wachusett, and brought home with him stately little Queen Bess, as he called her, and Gertrude, who had not yet given up romping. Nelly's phaeton was in constant requisition; and Bertie was charmed and won by the girl who could climb trees, jump litches, and even waded in the brook.

"A horrid hoiden!" declared Maud to her few select friends, while Dr. Kinnard longed to transfer the glowing pink cheeks, laughing healthful eyes, and round, supple figure to his own prim, stiff little daughter, who was so flounced and puffed and ribboned, that she looked like a French wax doll in a fancy-store. Often he wondered how he could best place her in the care of her sensible young stepmother.

The porch was completed; and even Mother Kinnard admitted it to be a great improvement. There was still one pleasant west window left, and the extension was really quite a room; one corner being left for a comforta-

ble chair and workstand, the rest shelved prettily, the wood-work being held up by tasteful iron brackets. Already it presented a homelike appearance.

Nelly had made one stipulation about the furniture.

"Let it be neat and pretty," she said, "but not expensive; something we can all enjoy, and that will not bring Bertie into punishment if he should chance to climb on it; for I think Bertie is slowly being given over to my tender mercies."

It was too true. When Miss Grove was informed that the doctor had resolved to send Bertie to school in the village as soon as the fall term commenced, her anger was deep, not loud. It seemed as if she took a malicious pleasure in having the child positively disagreeable to his stepmother.

The crowning point of all delight to Nelly had been a new piano.

"It seems as if I was just beginning to live," Nelly said to her own dear mother. "I am getting fitted into my place, and trying to make it a centre of pleasure: if I can only be wise and patient."

"One doesn't get fitted instantly; and after that is the becoming settled and easy and familiar; and then the bits of love, and bits of work, the flowers to gather, and the flowers that one must let seed for next year's growing. A little kingdom — every household is that — to render it fitter for the great kingdom; to shape and garnish and color with good words and works, so that there may be a great joy when the other household is entered upon. It comes with time. None of us get finished and furnished in a few weeks."

No. All this was a type of something greater. Lessons to be learned every day, blurred and crooked writing to be gone over, until the angel of the Lord turned the clean white page in the other country. She had only gone a little distance in this, — the kingdom of Here and Now, through which we must all make our way.

CHAPTER XI.

“Still, when we purpose to enjoy ourselves,
To try our valor, fortune sends a foe ;
To try our equanimity, a friend.” — GOETHE.

Six months had come and gone since Nelly Kinnard had said her bridal vows in the pretty old parish church of her childhood. At Edgerly there was one old, sleepy church, and a new and rather struggling chapel. It had proved a source of mortification to Miss Grove that Mrs. Kinnard had elected to cast in her lot with this poor interest. What could attract a person of any taste and culture?

“I must say,” answered Nelly pleasantly, “that I like Mr. Dudley ever so much better than Dr. Henderson. He is so thoroughly in earnest with his work, that it inspires one to come to his aid. And where one is needed urgently, always seems to me the proper place.”

“But there is so much in desirable church associations, especially in country-places. One’s position is established by the society one is known to keep, and judged too. I regret there should be any division in the family in such matters. I think it sets a very bad example before children; but I must insist upon my sister’s children being brought up in *her* faith, since the doctor is not a member anywhere.”

Her faith? Alas! it had not been much of any thing, except to go to church on a pleasant Sunday, when she had some elegant new garments; and then she found the sermon tiresome, the prayers too long, and the singing

miserably poor. But Miss Grove had allied herself with the most aristocratic church in Edgerly, — a society composed largely of “good old families,” who scarcely condescended to look at their neighbors, the mill-owners and factory-masters, to say nothing of the under-strata, — workers, whom they held in supreme contempt.

Nelly had felt a little delicate, at first, about the division in religious matters, — that of belonging to different denominations.

“Go just where you like,” said the doctor. “I do not attend much, anyhow; but I’ll accompany you when I can. And, if you like the chapel best, why, take that, then. Many of my poor patients belong there; and I must say, if ever there was an earnest, self-denying man, — a man who studied the real good of his fellow-creatures, body and soul, — Dudley is that one. And there are many cases, — more, perhaps, than ministers would care to acknowledge, — where you can only get at a man’s soul through his body. How much of religion, I wonder, is made up of comfortable incomes, pleasant homes, good clothes, and nothing special to worry one? Put some of these simpering saints in the place of poor Jim Lane’s wife, with her drunken husband, her five little children, and her daily toil of washing and ironing to get them bread, and see how patient, how trusting, how resigned to God’s will, they would be. And she brings her little gift weekly; Dudley tells me; saves it out of her hard-earned wages. I declare, it shames us easy-going people. There, my dear, I have preached you quite a sermon; but the upshot of it is, if you like to go there, and can help them along in any way, never mind Aunt Adelaide.”

She remembered the lessons inculcated in her girlhood: she could even look back and see how her dear father had labored to break down these petty social distinctions, and that, year by year, the rich and poor had come nearer to each other. They did not turn out in a mass, and clamor

for entrance at rich people's parties, as Mrs. Fairlie had so much dreaded that they would, unless kept in their place.

In spite of what Miss Grove termed "her unfortunate church associations," young Mrs. Kinnard had been quite a social success. She was undeniably stylish, even in her plainest dressing. Her slender, elegant figure; her really lovely face, in its youth and brightness; and the something in her voice, which was, I think, the cheerful ring; the unaffected tone of warmth and interest, — attracted strongly. People who had made formal calls once or twice a year at the doctor's began to drop in oftener. Others — good-hearted, social people, without much cultivation, but who adored him for saving, as they always believed, the life of a dear child, or wife, or husband — were delighted to come, from that overflowing sense of gratitude, and said afterwards, "I had such a delightful time! Mrs. Kinnard is as lovely as she can be. Why, I almost felt as if she was some relation; so different from Miss Grove! If there ever was an out-and-out old maid, she's one. I do wonder how they all get along; but the doctor's just as happy as he can be. You can see that in his face."

Which was true enough. He did not grow young or radiant: he had too many grave cares for that, too great a responsibility of life and death, and carried about with him a continual burthen of others' sorrows and perplexities. For of all people, perhaps, a physician feels this most keenly, — the undertow of want or care or unhappiness that keeps dragging back his patient, and too often sets at nought the finest skill, at last, perhaps, drifting the poor being out beyond the reach of help. His whole heart and soul were in his profession: in fact, for years it had been his solace, and taken the best of his life and interest. The new influence softened and mellowed. Sometimes, in secret, he called himself an old fool, and

tried to be a little cold or pre-occupied ; but the beseeching eyes thawed the deceitful crust, that was not ice at all, but only a shameful make-believe.

The alteration in the house became a subject of neighborhood comment and congratulation. Nelly opened the parlor-windows every morning, and let in a cheerful, soft-toned light here, and a long arrowy ray of sunshine there, that gave it an inviting look, without any glare. She was an artist by perception. She could have arranged all the accessories of a picture, though the genius to paint it was not hers. Fan had seemed to inherit that mother-gift. But Nelly's chairs were never ranged stiff against the wall ; rather in dainty groups of twos and threes, just as if a social party sat there a moment ago, chatting. Vases of beautiful grasses and fern-leaves, and some brilliant autumn trophies, peeped out here and there, instead of the ugly, expensive things that had adorned it formerly. Its furnishing had not cost half that "my poor, dear sister" had spent ; and the doctor felt quite at home, lounging on the sofa, while Nelly played and sang.

She had not left her impress quite so strongly on the so-called sitting-room. Mother Kinnard had a way of re-arranging. She would straighten out chairs, pile up books, push the workstand into some corner, and, not infrequently, set the vase of flowers on the mantle-piece, after Nelly had placed it on the centre-table. But the flower-corner was complete. Nelly had stocked it quite to her fancy, with Mat for *aide-de-camp*. The man had a great passion for flowers, and had picked up a little knowledge, here and there, of their needs and culture. But there had never been any place to keep them in the winter : so he saw them all die with a sad heart at the touch of autumn frosts ; and, when the small greenhouse was begun, his delight was boundless.

"You have won Mat's heart," declared the doctor. "I hardly know whether to be jealous or not. I'm

afraid he will be petitioning for a greenhouse in good earnest presently."

They had discussed it a little between them: so Nelly smiled.

"I don't believe but what I could build one, another summer, at a small expense," Mat had said, tangling up his curly chestnut hair. "There'd be the heating, to be sure; and I don't just know" —

"You might be studying up on the subject, Mat. I have several books that you may look over at your leisure. And we will see how this succeeds."

"You are very kind, I'm sure. I've always had a hankerin' after such things. I had a little one once, ma'am — maybe the doctor told you? and she used to be forever bringin' in little nosegays, if 'twas no more than a cloverhead and a buttercup, — any thing that had a little color in it. I never see a bit of clover, but her eyes seem to look out of it at me. I wasn't caring much for such simple things before; but they seem so near since she has gone!"

Ferns had been brought in from the woods, and a great box filled. Then there were geraniums, monthly roses, carnation-pinks, and flowering vines put out in corners. Odd plants, too, that one and another of the neighbors sent in, and now that very little was left out of doors, save chrysanthemums, the bright bower was a delight to Nelly, and gave her bloom enough for some parlor-bouquets, or a few to send to a sick patient.

But, as Mat had taken a liking to the mistress for her bonny face and pleasant ways, Jane's prejudice had grown more bitter and unreasonable. That she was young; that she "knew nothing about housekeeping, you may be sure, girls never do now-a-days;" that she put on airs; that she had the doctor "completely under her thumb" — were a few of Jane's grievances; for Jane had taken great pride that the doctor could not be ruled by

womenkind, and was not to be caught by the best of them. He had been caught. He allowed his wife privileges in the office and the "den" that were unheard of before. He had turned out the first wife's furniture to make room for her nonsense and flummery. Jane was severely and intensely practical. She would have had nothing in the world but what was useful; and she would have shut up the best of that in the parlor, to be dusted out once a week, and swept on rare occasions. One day, — daring innovation! — Nelly had set an obnoxious vase of flowers on the dining-table. There had been two brackets put up in the hall, on which they were generally kept. Jane caught it up indignantly, and restored it to its usual place.

Nelly came in a moment afterward. She had seen the movement indistinctly from the sitting-room.

"Jane," she said in a quiet tone, "will you please put that vase back on the table? I desire to have it there."

"It's only in the way," snapped Jane, going steadily about her business.

"That, I think, is my affair, as it is my table;" and the voice kept its even, cheerful tenor. "You will oblige me by restoring it to its place."

Jane had not the courage to actually disobey in so trifling a matter. It was not in *her* department, and could in no wise interfere with her work or her comfort. Something stronger than her own angry reasoning impelled her; but it came down with a thump that splashed the water, and shook off some of the leaves.

"If you had let it be at first, we should not have had this litter," said her mistress.

Jane slammed the door. For days afterward, she snapped, instead of speaking like a reasonable woman. Even the doctor remarked it.

"Jane has a great deal to do," said Miss Grove; "and the regular habits of the family have been so broken up,

that it makes twice the work. And servants, I suppose have much the same feelings and tempers that other people consider their rights."

"It would be better to devote half a day to the tantrum, and get over it;" and the odd twinkle gleamed in the doctor's eye. "I think I can understand how a person can and does get fearfully angry; but it always seemed so small and narrow to me to be venting one's spite for days upon all sorts of inoffending-objects. Jane is not as good tempered as she used to be; and, at her best, she is rather trying. But yesterday Mat was complaining of her."

"It is hardly wisdom to pay attention to servants' tales," returned Miss Grove with asperity.

"I desire to have every one well treated in my house," was the doctor's pointed rejoinder.

And so the daring innovation of having flowers on the table at meal-times stood its ground in spite of Miss Grove's covert sneers, and Mother Kinnard's complaints. Nelly took them off before the table was cleared; so that Jane should have no excuse for carelessly breaking the vase. The former had none of the fine sense of beauty in her soul. What society, or "our set," ordained, was fit and proper: to swerve a hair's-breadth was out of taste. Her sphere of thought had grown narrower with every year, as her circle had grown smaller. Mrs. Kinnard had an old person's dislike of things and ways which she had not been accustomed all her life, or that were not brought directly from the city. If Barton only *had* married Adelaide, how smoothly matters would have gone!

Bertie was still a bone of contention under the surface. Nelly wished sometimes, in moments of vexation, that they would do or say the same things in the doctor's presence; but her enemies were of the wary kind, and she was much too proud for complaint, even if she could have thought it right. The new liberty emboldened the

child greatly, like all children who have been completely under the domination of a strong will. He was not especially bright or companionable: in fact, only Nelly, so used to children, realized the darkness and vacancy in the poor child's soul; while in all matters acquired through study, or any process of memory, he was far in advance of most children of his age. He took his stepmother's overtures of friendliness in a wondering manner, as if he could not quite fathom them, and half suspected some ulterior motive; but, with a sort of animal instinct, he was fascinated by her magnetic voice, the glance of her dark, soulful eyes, the touch of her soft hand; and when he began fairly to understand that he, too, had a claim upon her, he was quite inclined to make it paramount and troublesome. He brought her the largest and showiest flowers for her hair, and could hardly be made to understand why they were not suitable. If he stood by her, his feet always became entangled in her dress, and a stumble would be the result: if he sat by her, he managed to rumple every thing within his reach, and sometimes she felt that he was a heavy burthen.

This preference and awakening of an unreasoning affection stirred a passion of jealousy in Miss Grove's soul. That any child of her "poor dead sister's," so wronged by having a young and pretty stepmother appointed over it, should hug its chain, and caress its jailer, was unendurable. Her claim to this home lay in her hold on the children's hearts; and how had she striven to endear herself to them? Maud, it is true, had much in common with her aunt; but, when Bertie grew out of authority, he grew out of every thing.

She made one effort to persuade Dr. Kinnard to give up the school-plan, but found him immovable.

"You will have enough to do with Maud's education," he said briefly. "The boy wants to be with other boys."

“I warn you that he will not learn half as much. I have taken a great deal of pains with these children of my ‘poor dear sister.’ I cannot, of course, expect them to be as dear to any one else. And, since they are to have something of their own, it is necessary that they should be trained to fill their proper position,” said Miss Grove with a kind of injured dignity.

“Very few children are any the better for being brought up with money expectations,” returned the doctor impatiently. “I do not want any such foolish idea put into Bertie’s head. He must take his chance with other boys.”

“As I said, I do not expect any one to be as much interested in their welfare as I am” —

“That is all pure nonsense, Adelaide,” interrupted the doctor, this time angrily. “They are *my* children, you will please remember; and, if I have little of a father’s foolish vanity, no one shall question my fatherly interest or authority.”

She knew she had gone far enough then: so she wisely let the subject drop. But she managed to work upon Bertie’s fears.

“Will the teacher whip me a great deal?” Bertie asked his new mamma one day.

“He will not whip you at all, Bertie, unless you are very, very naughty.”

“But I am always bad,” the child returned in a most matter-of-fact way. “Aunt Adelaide says so.”

“Not always, I think. You obey papa and me pretty well.”

“But you never give me any hard things to do, and you take me out driving, and never send me away from the table. You *are* good, although Aunt Adelaide says you are not.”

Nelly flushed indignantly. “Bertie,” and her tone was very decisive, “you must not repeat to me what Aunt

Adelaide says. If you do, I cannot take you out driving. Remember that, will you? And I do mean to be good to you, and love you, for you are my little boy."

"Can I *always* say mamma to you?" he asked timidly.

"Always." Ah, if she could make him understand! If she could have him alone; but the conflicting influences confused his brain, so little used to reasoning.

"But I can't to Aunt Adelaide. She makes me say, 'stepmother.'"

The child had a most unfortunate habit of frankness. The only redeeming point in it was, that he was not a very communicative child, and somewhat shy of strangers. Nelly had worked hard for her little influence over him.

This came to the doctor's attention one day.

"Adelaide," he said sharply, "when you speak to the children of Mrs. Kinnard, I want you to call her mamma, or mother. Stepmother is a hateful term anyhow; and I will not have it used in my house."

"Can I help what the world says, Barton? If you wanted it to approximate nearer a fact, you should have married an older woman. The relation is apparent at a glance. And people will call things by their *true* names," with a somewhat bitter emphasis.

"I married to suit myself. I have giving the children a kind, affectionate, pleasant-tempered mother; and I will have her respected as such in this house. If you, or any one, try to widen the breach, it will be at the risk of my most serious displeasure."

Maud studiously refrained from giving Nelly any name while in her presence; but elsewhere she always said, "My stepmother," with a kind of martyr-like air; and, when she and Aunt Adelaide were together, they used no other term. Jane, too, had been rebuked by the doctor; and it added another fagot to the smouldering embers of her dislike.

So far, it must be conceded, Jane had held her way royally. She was housekeeper at Dr. Kinnard's; and woe betide the unlucky wight who dared to speak of her as a servant! A woman came in on Monday to help with the washing. The last piece must be up by three o'clock, and then commenced the ironing of the plain clothes, as they were taken down from the line. There was cold meat for dinner; but it was always nice,—and much tartness until the ironing was finished. After that Jane devoted herself heart and soul to cooking until Friday morning, when she swept the house through. The dusting could be done by each individual at her leisure. In the afternoon came scrubbing; and on Saturday the house was like a new pin. She was proud of her abilities; and they were of the old-fashioned, severe order. Nelly accepted her, as every one else had, though she managed to make a few alterations in the rigid rule. When the doctor was out past meal-time, she arranged a dainty table in the "den," which was certainly outgrowing its name, and taking on an inviting and hospitable appearance. She brought in the daring innovation first on washing-day; and Dr. Kinnard was delighted beyond measure. To be sure, Jane's kitchen was large and clean: there were two or three beyond, and it would have answered well for a dining-room. But the doctor enjoyed the cosey meal alone with his wife so very much, that he proposed releasing Jane from such service in the future. True, there were many little snubs and discomforts; but Nelly took them patiently. No one should say with truth that she had made the first difficulty in the house.

Every one except Aunt Adelaide agreed that having Bertie away at school was a decided success. The house was so much quieter. At half-past eight some one was generally ready to take him to the village; and, as he frequently walked home, he was not back until four. He liked it too. Truth to tell, he did not have to study half

as hard as under his aunt's *régime*. After a week or two Mr. Herrick had said to the doctor, —

“Kinnard, that boy of yours has been dreadfully crammed. He has a very retentive memory, and fair powers of application; but he has not been taught to think, or to depend upon himself. I shall have to take quite a different method with him, and he may seem not to improve so rapidly; but it will be better for him in the end. He will be a boy, not a prodigy.”

“Very well,” returned the doctor: “it is just what I want. I don't delight in prodigies myself.”

The latent brightness in Bertie, repressed by his aunt's rigidity and sternness, cropped out now and then. He grew rougher and noisier: he even had the temerity to indulge in a whistle now and then. Nelly had hard work to keep him within bounds; for Miss Grove seemed to take delight in bringing out his worst points. If they only *could* pull together, Nelly thought regretfully; but she saw with pain, that, whatever she joined in, Miss Grove would not only leave, but throw covert obstacles in her way. No authority in the house was to be shared.

“Mrs. Kinnard is a very headstrong and self-willed young person, with no experience whatever,” Miss Grove was fond of explaining to her friends. “I can plainly foresee that the child will be ruined. When he becomes perfectly unmanageable, no doubt he will be thrown back upon my hands.”

Nelly Kinnard was not thinking of the children, as she stood, in a rather abstracted manner, pinching dead leaves from her plants, and training up tender shoots that showed a disposition to go astray. That morning she had taken Bertie to school, made a few purchases in the village; and, as she was driving slowly homeward, Mr. Dudley had overtaken her.

“O Mrs. Kinnard!” he exclaimed, “I was just going

out to see you. I have a matter of importance to talk over."

"Very well. Will you take a little drive with me, and explain it?" she said cordially.

"Would you mind driving toward Northrup's Mill? There is a sick woman I must see; and the morning is glorious."

"With pleasure."

He sprang in, and, after a few pleasant comments on various matters, launched into his plan.

"What I want is something to bring the people together socially. We had a Mite Society last winter; but it was given over into the hands of the younger members, who, after a while, did not care to go, unless they could have a good time. Our sewing-society languished also. I should like to unite the two, and mingle the young and the elders together. Now, if we could have a sewing-society meet, say, once a month, in the afternoon, to make up garments for the poor, or perhaps fancy articles, with a simple tea, and gentlemen coming in the evening, and young people who might not be able to give the whole afternoon. We could have conversation and music, and whatever other diversions were thought best;" and he glanced at her questioningly.

"Why, I think it an admirable idea. I do not see that you need any help in the plan;" and she smiled.

"I am glad it meets your approval. You see, neither young nor old could fancy themselves justified in staying away. And now what I want is some one to take hold of it with a vim, and make it a success. I would have them meet first at the rectory, but I have no wife to enter into the scheme; and, though Mrs. Chase is an excellent housekeeper, I am quite afraid this would be beyond her. She could do every thing perfectly but the entertaining; and that would frighten her to death. So much depends upon the manner in which a plan blossoms out!" he continued anxiously.

"Indeed it does," said Nelly warmly.

"And that brings me to the point of my errand. I want to persuade you to undertake it. You have the prestige of being a clergyman's daughter, and know how these matters ought to be managed. Then you are Dr. Kinnard's wife, and occupy that broad, middle-ground position, not unlike that of a clergyman's household. Neither highest nor lowest would be afraid to come. Then I think you could make it a success. Seventeenthly and lastly, — and this is an important part," glancing at her with a piquant smile, — "I fancy you would have the courage to give the assembled multitude a plain tea. You would not be afraid of being called 'stingy;' " and he laughed. "If Mrs. Dr. Kinnard gave people sandwiches and one kind of cake, with perhaps a plate of grapes or apples, Mrs. Newbury or Mrs. Thornton might follow in such sensible footsteps. I have thought of seven people who could have this entertainment; and that will take us quite along. Now have I made a bad beginning?"

"I should like very much to do it," said Nelly frankly. "I will consult the doctor;" and then she thought of the home-arrangements that could not be explained.

"But I had his permission first for consulting you," Mr. Dudley announced with an expression of amusement.

"Then you may consider it settled. I have been thinking, ever since I came to Edgerly, that there ought to be some attractive social life in the church."

"We did quite well last winter; but I felt that I wanted it placed on a new basis. If you *will* only help me," he said entreatingly.

"Begin with a moderate estimate of my abilities," she returned gayly. "I am a stranger, for one thing, a new-comer; and my ways may not be as attractive as you think."

"I am quite willing to risk that."

Then they went on to discuss the minor points, — the

hard work it had been with this small and poor interest, since most of the well-to-do people preferred to go to the wealthier church. They arranged their plan satisfactorily; and afterward Nelly laid it before the doctor, who assented willingly. On Sunday notice had been given out for the Wednesday evening following. Nelly had not deemed it prudent to inform Jane on Monday; and here it was Tuesday morning. She found that she, like the rest, had fallen a little in awe of Jane; and she smiled at herself, thinking of it. But domestic altercations were not pleasant; and they had marked every step of the way in her new home. Was it strange that she should sigh a little for the sweet peace left behind with her girlhood?

“I am actually growing cowardly,” she said, giving herself a kind of mental shaking. “I will not put it off a moment longer.”

CHAPTER XII.

"A warm hearth, and a bright hearth, and a hearth swept clean,
Where the tongs don't raise a dust, and the broom isn't seen;
Where the coals never fly abroad, and the soot doesn't fall, —
Oh! that's the fire for a man like me, in cottage or in hall."

THE large kitchen was almost painfully tidy: Jane stood at the farther end, ironing, as Mrs. Kinnard entered. She glanced up, then down again at her work.

"Jane," said her mistress in a pleasant tone, "I have a little matter to — to lay before you, and consult you about. The sewing-society of St. Mark's Church is to meet here to-morrow afternoon. The new regulation is to be a simple supper, — sandwiches and one kind of cake. But it will make some extra work; and you had better have help in washing the dishes. Biscuits and bread, and boiled ham or tongue" —

Jane sat down her iron with decision, and looked her young mistress square in the face.

"Who is going to make bread and biscuits?" she demanded in a tone that would have been insolent, but for its unsympathetic hardness. "I sha'n't be through ironing until mid-afternoon."

"I don't know how you will manage with Jane," the doctor had said. "Wait until after washing-day, and then go carefully."

"I shall be very glad to make them myself. The doctor sent home some tongues yesterday, and there is part of a cold ham; enough, I think. I might prepare the tongues for boiling while you have your ironing-fire.

The bread, I suppose, is nearly out. To-morrow is baking-day" —

"Family baking. But you don't suppose there would be enough for a raft of people?" was the gruff assumption. "I haven't been used to such doings. If I'd had a longer notice; but as it is" —

Jane looked up again to take the measure of her mistress. She had had several battles with Miss Grove and Mother Kinnard, before she made them "understand their places," as she phrased it. "For I won't have any one poking around a kitchen of mine," was her favorite announcement. "I'm here to do the work; and I can do it too." Once Miss Grove had gone so far as to discharge her; but the doctor had reinstated her, and begged that his sister-in-law would not interfere in the future.

This slender, girlish figure, this youthful face, almost pleading in its desire for reconciliation, did not appear a very formidable adversary. Jane set her lips firmly, and stared out of her steel-blue eyes.

"We shall not want the biscuit made before to-morrow morning, in any event; and nothing could have been done yesterday, as you well know. Indeed," — to give her authority more weight, — "the doctor preferred that I should not speak of it yesterday. I have been used to cooking and baking, sometimes for a large number, and could get the things ready myself; will be glad to, since you are so busy. If I can have the fire this afternoon, therefore" —

"Well, you can't," interrupted Jane fiercely. "Whatever is done in this kitchen, I do: it's what I'm here for. I can't work with anybody fussing round, as the doctor knows. If I'm to cook, and get meals, and do the work generally, I must plan for myself. I can't be ordered about, nor have other people planning" —

"Jane," Mrs. Kinnard said with unmistakable dignity, "I think you forget to whom you are talking. I am Dr.

Kinnard's wife, and, by virtue of that, mistress in this house. It is not my duty to consult you as to who shall come in it, or at what particular time they shall come; and it is my privilege, at least, to enter and inspect every room in my house; and, if I choose to do any kind of work, I shall do it."

This was not just the kind of enemy that Jane had vanquished before; but she was resolved not to haul down her colors. She tossed her head with an indignant air, and confronted her mistress boldly.

"Dr. Kinnard is *my* employer; and *my* bargain is made with him," she retorted angrily. "I've always said I never would bargain with a woman, and I never will. And if he wants any thing" —

"He does not want any thing. The members of my own church have been invited to hold their sewing-society at this house to-morrow afternoon. It is my entertainment. I shall see that the supper is prepared."

"See to it, then," and Jane gave a scornful laugh. "Perhaps you will see to the ironing, and to the dinner?"

Nelly could not endure that. Indeed, she wondered now how she had endured Jane's insolent bearing from the first. Her eyes flashed forth their indignation; and, though her lip quivered, her voice was steady.

"Jane," she said, "I want you to give the matter a little calm thought, and then decide. If you stay, you will remember that I am mistress in this house, that I have a right to give orders, and expect to have them obeyed. If you choose to apologize for this unwarranted conduct, you can remain, otherwise you may consider yourself discharged. Leave your ironing."

"Finish it, then, and get your dinner! I am not beholden to any one for a living. But I guess Dr. Kinnard will have something to say about it."

"Very well;" and the mistress stood her ground fearlessly.

Jane marched off in high dudgeon, and, a minute later, was regaling Mother Kinnard with a somewhat exaggerated description of the affair.

Nelly took a survey of the situation. It was ten o'clock. There was steak for dinner, vegetables to be prepared, and dessert to be made. In nothing must she fail. Seeing Mat pass the window, she called to him.

"Will you go to Mrs. Daly's, Mat, and ask her to come here at once. Tell her that I wish to see her particularly."

Mat was off in an instant. Nelly finished ironing the skirt Jane had left, and had begun with another piece, when Mrs. Daly made her appearance, — a nice, pleasant-looking woman of thirty-five, in a pretty calico gown, and linen collar, and with a cheerful face that won you at once. She was a widow, and did sewing generally; though now and then she went out to help a neighbor in sickness or trouble.

"Mrs. Daly," began Nelly with a smile, "I am in a little perplexity, and took the liberty of sending for you. Jane has mutinied, and I want some assistance. The prospect of the sewing-society seemed too much for her."

"I wonder that you stood her even this long, Mrs. Kinnard. She's a splendid hand at work; but she has a queer temper. She had it as a girl. She never would work under any one. And now what shall I do?" With that, Mrs. Daly took off her bonnet and shawl.

"There is dinner to get, and the ironing to finish. I am really anxious to go on promptly. When a girl like Jane gets to thinking herself so absolutely necessary as she has been for the past two or three years, it is as well for her to have a lesson. But, first, were you busy?"

"Fortunately not. I had just finished some shirts for Mr. Hildreth, and thought I would take a holiday. What is there for dinner? The inevitable potato, of course. Can I not see to the vegetables first?"

“If you will. How good you are to me, Mrs. Daly!” Nelly said impulsively. “Sending for you came like an inspiration to me.”

“I am glad you did.”

They went at the dinner in earnest, although some time was wasted in finding what they needed, being new to the place. Then Nelly bethought herself of a pudding that was a great favorite with them at home, and tried her hand at it. When Mrs. Daily had her part in train, she went back to the ironing; and the two had a rather merry visiting-time. But, when Nelly went to set the table, she found Mother Kinnard seated in one of the great easy-chairs, looking very solemn indeed. She went around in silence for a few minutes; then the elder lady broke it, saying, in a rather sharp tone, —

“I think you have made a great mistake quarrelling with Jane.”

The color flashed to Nelly's brow. She hated so to be accused of quarrelling.

“There was no cause of dispute. I was explaining a matter to Jane, and she took umbrage at it, and was very insolent. I suppose I am mistress of the house; at least, sufficiently so to have a servant attend to any request.”

“My son will never give up Jane, never. You have had very little experience with servants, or you would be able to recognize her superior capabilities at once.”

“I do consider her an excellent woman in many respects; and yet it does not seem right to me that a whole household should come under the domination of a domestic.”

“Well, you will see. You, at least, had no right to discharge her. Although she will not go away.”

Nelly bit her lip hard to keep from an indignant reply. Arguing the point was useless; so she went on with her work. The dinner-bell rang promptly, and the table was in its usual order. Nelly had bathed her face, and put on

a dainty white ruffled apron. Miss Grove came down stairs the moment the doctor entered the hall. He kissed his wife quietly, — the foolishness both women sneered at, — and took his place.

“How elegantly this steak is broiled!” was his rather unusual comment. “Jane has exceeded herself, which is saying a good deal, especially on ironing-day. My idea of comfortable living is — and when I am rich enough I shall indulge in it — to have a laundry entirely distinct from the house, and to keep an extra person to manage it, who need not bring her temper into the regular household department. How will that do, Nelly?”

“It would answer admirably, and not be very expensive, either.”

“I proposed it once to Jane; but she did not seem to understand the manifold advantages.”

Mother Kinnard had planned an attack very nicely, she thought; but the doctor's commendation quite destroyed the point of it, and she preserved a discreet silence. Nelly changed the current of the conversation; but she knew it must come presently. She touched the bell, and Mrs. Daly entered to remove the plates. Dr. Kinnard glanced up, and nodded cheerfully; but his mind had settled then on the rather puzzling symptoms of a patient.

Miss Grove ate a little of her pudding. Was the whole meal to pass, and nothing to be said? So she entered the wedge herself.

“Maud, my dear,” in a peculiarly marked tone, “I am sorry to deprive you of dessert; but this pudding is quite too rich for you. Do not eat any more.”

The doctor glanced up.

“I was thinking it delightful. It has quite a new taste to me. Is it ruinously rich, fit food for dyspepsia?”

“I should think it certainly was.”

“On the contrary, Miss Grove, it is not as rich as one

or two that Jane makes, which are eaten with great complacency," returned Nelly, trying to keep her voice steady.

"Why, where is Jane?—called home? Her mother was no worse yesterday. I was in there."

"I will explain the matter by, and by," returned his wife. "Will you have some more pudding?"

"Well, yes. Is it a preparation of your fairy fingers?"

She laughed and blushed, happy to have satisfied him in this her first meal, and feeling that she had vanquished Jane. Her husband questioned no further, to Miss Grove's great dissatisfaction.

Afterward, in the office, Nelly told her story. Dr. Kinnard looked very grave.

"You, see," he said in return, "I had to take Jane's part in the beginning. Mother and Adelaide would never have agreed in ordering a servant. She has grown into authority by degrees; and, honestly, we have all helped to make her of consequence. But, when it comes to such an issue as this, there is but one course. I shall be sorry to lose her, and you will have a good deal of trouble and anxiety before you are suited again; but you are mistress of this department."

"Oh, thank you a thousand times, Barton!" and she kissed his broad forehead. "I was so afraid you would blame me; but I *did* try to be patient."

"I have been thinking for some time that a change might be beneficial. Mat complains a good deal. The truth is, Jane is somewhat of a tyrant. Now, if you will send her to me, we will have the matter settled. Possibly your dinner took me on the weak side;" and he smiled.

"I would rather have her discharged, Barton. I certainly *can* manage. So please do not take an apology."

Then she sent Mrs. Daly to summon Jane. The irate woman went down to the office with a lofty air, having

fortified herself with various points and arguments which were quite needless. Indeed, she was so surprised and stunned by the sudden turn in affairs, that she allowed herself to be overwhelmed by the first flood, and then could not regain her footing. Consequently she propped up her failing cause with anger, and lost it.

After dinner she packed her trunk, and retired from the scene of action, taking with her the warm sympathy of two members of the family. And yet, down in her heart, Mother Kinnard felt rather relieved; for she had not enjoyed Jane's supreme power.

"But that is the first move," she said to Miss Grove. "She winds Barton completely around her finger. We cannot tell whose turn it will be to go next."

Nelly and Mrs. Daly made ready for the sewing-society, and found it no wonderful burthen. Mrs. Daly knew of a young girl who was very ready to come in and help wait on the supper-table. Soon after dinner a wagon arrived with baskets and bundles of sewing-materials; and presently the people began to gather.

The hall stove had been put up, and diffused a cheerful warmth throughout. All the doors were open, and the windows arranged to let in sufficient light and sunshine without making a glare. The state-parlor looked cosy and inviting. Pictures were shadowed with a bit of overhanging green, intermixed with scarlet autumn foliage. There were clusters of ferns that seemed endued with life and freshness, as they made a background for a bust or small statuette. The open piano had an hospitable air; and the books and engravings were provocative of idleness, rather than industry.

Mr. Dudley soon made his appearance. He had promised to come in time for re-organizing. Here were the officers of the old society; and everybody went to telling what it had been. Nelly helped Mr. Dudley to lead them back to business, and, after a little, the heads agreed.

The afternoon would be for work, the evening for entertainment; and the clause was inserted for simple suppers, though each woman made a mental reservation, until she saw what Mrs. Kinnard had. Then the work was drawn out. A few garments, a little half-finished fancy-work, patchwork, planning, and gossiping. Nelly tried to keep the latter very friendly in its tone. No minister's wife could have been more judicious.

There was another quiet little triumph that Nelly was enjoying immensely: this was the presence of Mother Kinnard, who in the beginning had ten minds out of the dozen against coming in. It wasn't "our church," and it wasn't exactly "my son's company;" and she still felt sore about Jane's discharge, and predicted that the thing would be a failure. But there was Mrs. Woodbury dressed in black silk and lovely old laces, taking, in a thankful spirit, Nelly's pretty adornment of a sprig of purple heliotrope in her waving, silvery hair, and saying, "Thank you, my dear! I would have gone twice as far for a bit of heliotrope." Then, when she brought her work over by Mrs. Kinnard, the old lady could not help thawing out a little; for Mrs. Woodbury belonged to one of the "old families," and her son was a representative at Washington. Then Nelly coaxed Mrs. Irwin into their circle, and left them chatting amiably. And so she moved from one to another, introducing some shy-looking girls, bringing groups together, and drawing out the social element. Others kept dropping in, and adding a stir and gentle confusion. "How much the rooms were improved!" "What a pretty conservatory!" "And how did Mrs. Kinnard manage to have so many flowers in bloom during the transition season?" "And who ever thought of having such lovely pansies in the fall! — quite as large as hot-house pansies." Of course she had been to Colden's Rock for ferns; and wasn't Kelly's Falls a beautiful spot? And then had she read this or that? and did she know how this apron was to be put together?

“I declare,” Mrs. Woodbury said with a cordial, motherly smile, “you might be a minister’s wife! I am almost sorry that Mr. Dudley did not get the start of our good doctor. Why, I never saw a sewing-society managed so admirably; and still the people come.”

It was getting dusk now. Dr. Kinnard hurried through with the last of his patients, and was home early, as Nelly had begged of him. Mrs. Daly was arranging the table quietly, without the rattling of spoons and knives and forks,—Jane’s usual accompaniment. Some of the elder gentlemen came to tea, and talked over church-matters and business-matters. The coffee and tea were fragrant, the bread and biscuit delightful, the cake plain, and great dishes of grapes afterward. When the long dining-table had been filled, Nelly brought out some cosey little tables, and seated two or four at them. The younger people stood up, or rambled around, with a plate in their hands, laughing and chatting. Dr. Kinnard did himself more than justice. He added life and zest, told two or three capital stories, and made everybody admire him more than ever.

They lingered over the table as if loath to break up the sociality; and at last Nelly begged her husband to take the crowd around him into the parlor. Miss Grove had condescended to come down to tea, and brought Maud, dressed like a fashion-plate.

“I suppose you hardly lay claim to your little daughter yet,” Mrs. Woodbury said in a low aside, when she found herself in a recess with Nelly. “Miss Grove is an admirable woman in some respects; but it doesn’t seem to me that she understands childhood at all. She acts as if it were something to be ashamed of, and laid aside as soon as possible. Now, I think true, pretty-behaved children are as much addition to a house as a beautiful picture, just in appearance merely; and then, when we think of them as our future men and women, we

long to have their lives complete and harmonious, with a springtime to them. And that poor little thing looks to me as if she never ran and played, or laughed freely. And she is dressed as if for a ball."

"Her aunt takes entire charge of her," Nelly said slowly.

"Yes. But I can't help wishing Providence would place her in your hands. Your own childhood is not so far back, but that you remember it."

There was a little shyness among the young folks about playing. If Mrs. Kinnard would only give them something first. So Mrs. Kinnard played a very spirited quick-step, and, at Mr. Dudley's desire, sang that sweet little home-song, "Don't be sorrowful, darling." Twenty years from this, would she sing with a still sweet voice?—

"We have had our May, my darling,
And our roses long ago;
And the time of the year, is coming, my dear,
For the silent night and the snow."

The only trouble with the evening was its brevity. Everybody was glad they had come, and sorry for those who had staid away. Mrs. Woodbury proposed to have the society next time at her house.

"But you will surely come," she entreated of Mrs. Kinnard. "And, my dear, I want to see more of you. I am an old lady, to be sure; but I still enjoy youth and brightness. And the doctor has always been such a favorite of ours. Come over and take tea with me in an informal way, and then ask me to spend the day with you. I get quite lonesome at times. My children are all married, and away; and my grandchildren can only come during vacations. Now remember. I do not ask favors very often;" and she kissed the fair face with motherly warmth.

The elder Mrs. Kinnard stood at a little distance, and

saw not only that, but some other very cordial partings. She understood, too, how very proud her son had been of his wife all the evening. Hardly another girl or woman in the room was as pretty; and yet she had no self-consciousness about it, — cordial, winsome, with a peculiar dignity that did not detach her from her husband, but made the years between less apparent. And to-night Miss Grove looked undeniably old. Whether it was her sage-green silk, which was very unbecoming, but had the merit of being a new color, or her supercilious air, Mrs. Kinnard could not decide. She had a misgiving, however, that “dear Adelaide” could never have made these people so enjoy themselves, or have won such golden opinions, or even brought the proud and happy look to “my son’s face.” She had not been called upon to love her first daughter-in-law. Mary Grove was not given to sentiment; and then, too, she had many other interests to life at that time. She seemed to feel a little jealous now of Mrs. Woodbury’s fondness. There are natures in this world that never can appreciate any thing until the verdict of others settles the claim; and Mrs. Kinnard’s was of this stamp. She might always consider her son foolish because he chose a poor wife when he might have had a rich one: but to-night she felt how sweet youth and beauty were to him; how he basked in it, as if it were sunshine. And even Mr. Dudley had studied curiously this bright, entertaining woman, with her exquisite social tact, her charming variety and adaptiveness, that infused a broad and generous charm outside of herself. The wedding-party, under Miss Grove’s management, had been stiff and lifeless in comparison with this.

And when they had all gone with merry good-nights and warm invitations, Dr. Kinnard took a long glance into the frosty air and starry sky, while his wife and mother stood there together.

"Did you think it was pleasant?" Nelly asked timidly, remarking the softened lines about the other's face.

"Why—yes," with some hesitation. "I had no idea as many *good* families went to St. Mark's. They used to go to Grace. And you've done very well to-night,—better than I thought you could, without Jane."

The doctor shut the door at that moment. "To tell the truth," he said laughingly, "Jane has been a sort of family ogre to us. I am glad she has gone. Mat says the kitchen is like paradise: so we will put up with a few mishaps and blunders for a while, hoping to end happily with a new servant who is not a scold."

"Mrs. Mercer told me of a woman that I am going to see to-morrow,— a German woman, whose husband was killed in a mill some months ago. She has one little child, a girl, and has gone out washing; but the girl at Mrs. Mercer's said she wanted a service place for the winter."

"Be sure to learn what her cooking capabilities are. I can't have you in the kitchen all the time, getting your face burned. What was her name?"

"Mary Berkman; and she lives in Allen's Row."

"Berkman—yes, I do remember—was caught in the machinery, poor fellow! Do you know that it is almost midnight, Mrs. Kinnard? and those society people were to go home at ten o'clock."

"They did begin at that time," returned Nelly laughingly.

"Dudley's delighted. He told me privately that they had taken in twenty-three dollars, and that he is quite sure no one could have made it such a success as you did. I really thought it very enjoyable; and I'm not much used to such things."

Nelly Kinnard laid a tired head upon her pillow; and yet she could not go to sleep. There were so many ideas floating through her brain—worlds to conquer; and Mother Kinnard had actually praised her.

“If it wasn't for Aunt Adelaide, I am quite confident that I could make her love me,” the young wife thought. “And she ought to love Barton ever so much better. Why is there not more real, vital love in the world that is not afraid to speak or to act for itself?”

CHAPTER XIII.

**"A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food,
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles."**

WORDSWORTH.

"THEY'LL be glad enough to take me back again," Jane had said to her sister the day she left the Kinnards'. "I've been through this before, and don't feel at all alarmed. I know how to get along with those women; and not another girl in this town could manage either one of them. Mrs. Kinnard thinks she's wonderfully smart; but she'll see!"

And she did see. She found Mary Berkman the next morning, — a somewhat stout, rosy, good-natured looking woman, who could wash and iron with any one, and do plain cooking. "She could learn other things," she said with a cheerful smile. But she must take her little girl. She would go for less wages, if she could have her; and the child was very handy and quiet, and quick to mind. So Nelly proposed she should come a month on trial. Her cottage she could rent; and thus the bargain was concluded.

Mrs. Daly remained until Mary made her appearance. Mother Kinnard fretted about the child; but Nelly smoothed the matter by saying, that, if she proved a trouble, it was only for a month. So Mary took her place in the kitchen; and with a pleasant mistress to induct her, and explain the ways of the family, she

soon felt at home. Little Katy was very shy and quiet, and ready enough to do errands out of school.

Nelly astonished both her husband and his mother by her housewifely ways. Never was revolution in Dr. Kinnard's house more quietly effected. Not that they came to clear sailing at once. Miss Grove had some fault to find, and Jane's cooking appeared now to be her ideal.

"I must say, Adelaide, I do not observe any wonderful difference, except the variety in desserts;" and he glanced mischievously at his wife. "And the house is quieter. It must be acknowledged that Jane was that bad thing in woman, — a scold. I, for one, do not feel inclined to regret her, or to have her memory embalmed in my household."

Mother Kinnard ventured to make herself again at home in the kitchen. Nelly managed that she should not annoy Mary, and often consulted her upon some point that rendered her quite happy. Very slow work it was; but the young wife felt that she did gain a little in the esteem of the elder woman. A few times Mrs. Kinnard had said "Nelly" in speaking to her, which made her heart beat with unwonted emotion. Generally she evaded any name.

And Christmas came presently; for the last two months had gone very rapidly. It had never been made of much account in the doctor's family, — a rather formal presentation of gifts in the morning, but with no genial holiday aspect after that. It fell on Monday: so Nellie resolved, if her husband did not object, to spend three or four days at home, and keep the festival in the olden manner.

"I couldn't go with you, could I?" said Bertie wistfully. "And there's no school for a fortnight, either."

"Would you like to go? There are no little boys to play with;" and Nelly hesitated, thinking whether she wanted the bother on *her* holiday.

"I wouldn't mind. Couldn't I ride down on my sled? I might take it, you know."

"Herbert!" exclaimed a sharp voice, as Aunt Adelaide passed through the hall: it was late twilight, though the lamps were not lighted,—"Herbert, I am ashamed of you!—Mrs. Kinnard, do not, I pray, fill the child's head with any such folly. Children's visiting is a thing I should never allow, except at the home of a near relative, and I think I have *some* rights with my sister's children. I shall beg your father not to let you, even if he is weak enough to listen to such a preposterous idea."

Bertie began to whine.

"Never mind," said his mamma softly. "Let me tell you a Christmas story."

For once Aunt Adelaide took the start of them, and gained her point. The doctor coincided with her, that it would be quite absurd. Nelly said no more; and yet, from her heart, she pitied any children condemned to such a dreary holiday. Once she had half a mind to stay at home.

"Nonsense!" said the doctor peremptorily.

She went on Saturday, and had a lovely Christmas Sunday, — a preparation for the higher feast. How good it was to enjoy herself with the dear home-circle once more! Then, when they returned from the Christmas morning services, they found Dr. Kinnard ready to take dinner with them.

"But I must go back this evening," he said. "I have two quite critical cases on hand. However, it shall not spoil your holiday. You deserve a good long one, little woman, though Mary gave me private instructions to bring you home with me."

Nelly only smiled then; but some curious presentiment decided her to return. They had the tree just at dusk; and no one was more delighted with his remembrances than the doctor, who kissed his rosy sisters-in-law all

round, and declared that they were enough to spoil any man.

Nelly came down presently, warmly wrapped in her furs.

"But you are not going!" he cried in astonishment.

"Don't you want me?" she asked saucily.

"It is too bad!" said Gertrude. "Can't you make her stay, doctor?"

"Why, yes, I could, because, you see, she has promised to obey me. But then she looks so pretty, all muffled up to the tip of the nose, that really — I cannot resist. I am afraid I *do* want to take her."

"I should go to-morrow anyhow," said Nelly with a shower of kisses. "And you are all to come and keep New Year's with me, remember."

So they gave each other a fond good-by. Dr. Kinnard drew his wife tenderly under his wing; and they walked briskly toward the station.

"It was so generous of you to come!" he said once, as, making a slight misstep, he took occasion to draw her nearer. "You might have staid all the week, you know. I had promised not to grumble; though I must admit that I am always a little jealous of the circle at the rectory."

"And unjustly too," she answered with a gay laugh.

"They are girls, to be sure. Well, when I have had you twenty years, I may begin to feel quite assured of your regard."

"Twenty years!" she exclaimed. "Why, think how old I shall be!"

"And think how old I shall be! — hobbling round with a cane, no doubt;" and there was a sound of humorous complaint in his tone.

"We shall have had a glad, sweet summer, I trust," she made answer.

It seemed to him that he had just touched the boundaries of spring, mid-winter though it might be around.

And so they journeyed on until the familiar station came in sight with Mat awaiting them.

"Mat," said the doctor, "I wish you would drive right over to the Ritchies'. They are a good deal alarmed about their little girl; and I promised to drop in this evening. I feel anxious myself. Such a pretty little thing!—you never saw her, Nelly,—and their only child."

They flew like the wind. It was really exhilarating to Nelly. And now the moon was coming up, glinting every point of snow and ice with a thousand fairy sparkles.

"I think the symptoms are more favorable," said the doctor as he emerged from the Ritchies'. "I changed the remedies this morning, and I do believe now that I shall raise her. Did you get chilly, waiting?"

"No," returned Nelly.

"Why, Mat, you are in a hurry to-night," was his next comment. "Are you longing for your snug corner, with no Jane to scold?—Nelly, that was a masterstroke of yours;" and the doctor laughed gayly.

Mat made no reply until they reached the broad avenue. Then he loosed the reins, and, leaning over a little, said hesitatingly, —

"There's been an accident, doctor. Bertie had a fall, and broke his arm."

"Bertie!—broken his arm! When?"

"About three this afternoon. He was playing in the barn. He was pretty bad at first"—

"Is it set? What did you do?" and Dr. Kinnard sprang out of the sleigh.

"I went for Dr. Searles straight off; and he set it. But he kept fainting so often."

"Oh!" and Nelly uttered a little cry. "I am so glad I came with you!"

They entered the hall. The office-door was wide open.

Bertie lay on the couch, with Maud and Aunt Adelaide for attendants. The doctor marched over, and took his little son's limp hand.

"Bad business, Bertie," he said, but in a rather cheery tone. "Does it hurt much?"

"Has mamma come? Did you bring her?"

"Bad business indeed!" exclaimed Miss Grove, rising directly in Nelly's way. "Yet I must say, Barton, the child is justly punished. I hope it will be a lesson to him in the future. A more disobedient child I never saw. He has been completely ruined by foolish indulgence. He is no more the boy he was a year ago than a noxious weed is like a trained garden-plant. I look upon this as a direct interposition of Providence to call you all to your senses."

"What is all this about?" asked the doctor sharply, turning to his sister-in-law. "Can any one give me a coherent account?"

"I am trying to, if you will only have a little patience. How different you have grown of late!" and she cast an indignant glance upon him. "This morning Herbert was very impertinent; and I told him that he should keep his room the whole afternoon. I am sorry I did not lock the door; for he has come to have no sense of honor whatever. I went down stairs for a few moments; and, coward that he was, he took that opportunity to escape. So I say he deserved severe enough punishment to make him remember it one while. You had better take him up to bed now."

"No, don't!" almost screamed Bertie. "I want to stay just here. It hurts me to stir. — Mamma, keep me here;" and he stretched out his well arm imploringly.

"You see the display of temper;" and Miss Grove raised her head majestically. "Barton, do you mean that the child shall be ruined, body and soul? He always did need a strong hand. I'm sure I do not see where he

inherited his temper, not from *our* side. Maud is like her own dear mother. I never have any trouble with her. And Bertie was quite manageable until" —

"That will do, Adelaide. I have yet to learn where and how the child fell, and how much he is injured. There, hush, Bertie;" for he had begun an hysterical crying.

"Why, he ran out to the barn to hide himself, and fell from some of the rafters, and broke his arm," said Miss Grove with spiteful impatience, which she called just indignation. "Dr. Searles said it was a simple fracture, and, with care, would be well in a month. As if no one had ever broken a bone before!"

"Are you hurt in any other place, Bertie?" his father asked in a calm, tranquillizing tone.

"I am hurt all over. Oh, don't touch me, papa!" and he shrunk away.

"You and Maud may be dismissed," the doctor said briefly to his sister-in-law. "I want to make a slight examination; and I think he had better stay here for this night."

"It surprises me to see you indulge that child so ruinously. If his poor mother had lived" —

"That will do."

"Very well. I wash my hands of the whole matter. I would have devoted my life to my 'poor dead sister's' children; but, if you *will* interfere, take the risk yourself. If the child grows up a trouble to you and everybody else, remember that I warned you. — Come, Maud."

The doctor dropped into a chair. How many such scenes of angry persistence he had gone through in the past was known only to himself and God. Nothing can be more wearing and wearisome than people who are always in the right, and always ready to dispute to the last straw.

Nelly, meanwhile, had been taking off her hat, and

warm fur sack. Now she knelt by Bertie's couch. Suffering appealed to her strongly; and she knew by the sunken eyes, the pinched and tense lines, and ashen pallor, that the pain had not all proceeded from a child's irrational terror. She kissed the hand that lay there so limp and white.

"O mamma! don't go away and leave me! I like you better than any one else in the wide world, only Tom Lester at school. But you don't care for that, do you? He has such a splendid lot of things, and a real workshop; and his father is going to give him a pony next summer. He promised me a ride on it. But I'd rather live with you, if Aunt Adelaide wasn't here. Oh!" —

A sudden spasm seemed to shake the child. His eyes rolled wildly; and his lips were thin and blue. Nelly chafed the cold palm, and watched the face that had been so rosy an hour or two ago. Bertie drew a long, shuddering breath, and lay very quiet.

"It is something more than a broken arm," she said in a tremulous tone.

Dr. Kinnard started, came to the couch, and bent over his boy, over Nelly kneeling there, as he had never seen any woman kneeling in his house beside a child. Some peculiar emotion touched him deeply, a vision of motherhood glorified with her tenderness, — a lovely mother and a lovely child. He had seen it; but it had never been his.

"Bertie, my child, where was the pain?" But Bertie only moaned; and his father felt quite helpless.

"Nelly, you are making me chicken-hearted," he said with a little tremble in his tone. "I think I had better send you away as well."

"The child ought to be undressed. Will you keep him down here all night?"

"Bertie," and his father's hand was laid on his shoulder, tenderly now as any woman's, "my son, you must

be a brave little fellow, and let me see if you are injured elsewhere than in the arm.—Yes, if you could get his wrapper, Nelly.”

Nelly ran up stairs; and Miss Grove handed it out with a severely indignant sniff. Then she brought down one of her own pretty cologne-bottles that Bertie admired so much. Dr. Kinnard had been coaxing him gently, and now lifted up his shoulder; but, uttering an excruciating cry, the child fainted quite away.

“Quick, Nelly, take off his clothes. There is something very serious, I fear.”

With deft and rapid fingers, she disrobed him, and, with the doctor's assistance, put on the wrapper. Consciousness being restored, he began a brief examination. There was an internal injury; but whether it was merely the jar of the fall, or something more critical, could not as yet be told.

Bertie cried, and shrank from the handling, gentle as it was; but Nelly's sweet voice comforted and re-assured with a bravery not above the child's comprehension. She kissed him, too, with a soothing tenderness that quite magnetized him.

“I think I will go out, and question Mat a moment. You seem to be doing very well with him.”

But Mat could throw no further light upon the subject. Bertie had climbed to the loft, and must have made a misstep, as there was no floor laid there. Mat had found him lying on his side, insensible, brought him into the house, and gone immediately for Dr. Searles, who thought there was no damage done beside the fractured arm and a few bruises. He had not complained much until within an hour, though he had refused utterly to be taken up stairs.

“I must wait a day or two before I decide,” the doctor said as he returned to Nelly, who was holding the child's hand. “And now, my dear girl, had you not better

make some preparation for retiring? It is nearly eleven. I shall roll the other lounge in here, though I do not think I will have to watch absolutely."

"Oh, let me stay with you!" she pleaded.

"There is no need; and I would rather have you get a good night's sleep."

"I am so glad I came!"

"Why, you must have had a presentiment. Thank heaven you are here!" he said fervently, kissing the bright cheek.

But Bertie would not so easily relinquish his hold. Scarlet flushes were succeeding the deadly pallor; and he moved his head uneasily, crying out now and then with pain, and insisting on Nelly's keeping close beside him. "Don't let her take me away!" he would exclaim vehemently.

"I had better stay for a while," she said in a quiet tone. Then she hushed him, singing some childish hymn in her low soothing voice. The fever was coming on rapidly, and with it delirium. Dr. Kinnard sat grave and thoughtful. He had never seen his own children seriously ill. To a man of his theorizing and speculative turn of mind, Nelly presented an entertaining study as she lingered there in the dim light, watching the child, a bit of faded flower in her dark hair, that Gertrude had placed in it before dinner, the ruff of soft, wraith-like illusion around her shapely neck, the fair and slender hands, untiring it seemed to him. How different women were! He had seen many mothers,—fond, tender, indulgent; wise and foolish mothers, careless and indifferent ones, and others who seemed to take their children as a special grievance. He remembered well one who had done so. From their birth, they had been banished to the nursery. He generally found them crying or asleep in his brief visits. And he had never been made very welcome there. *She* could not endure to have him bestow any

attention on the children ; indeed, she took every courtesy proffered to any one else as a personal affront. Yet people outside had often found her very charming.

True, he might have grown fond of them afterward ; but — well, he had not cared. It brought a flush to his cheek as he remembered it. Aunt Adelaide was peculiar too. Authority was the one thing she did not desire to share. She had her own ideas, her own plans, her own ways, matured, she fancied, after much thought and experience. But how much of the vaunted experience of this life is simply a determination to carry out one's will, to have one's own way, and bend others to it ! And so she wanted people to be good and happy after her set plan. No bed of Procrustes was ever more rigid. She lopped off mercilessly. She compressed, flattened, stretched out, when there was really nothing to stretch. With Maud she had succeeded very well. The child was ladylike and high bred, as she considered high breeding. She knew more than most girls of her age : she had no foolish passion for dolls, or fairy-stories, or rude boisterous plays. Already she was a miniature woman, could detect imitation laces from real, and was quite a judge of silks and velvets, and very free to criticise the attire of any one in which there was any make-believe. But what of the poor starved little soul that never even knew the divine hungering for love ?

Dr. Kinnard had not been blind to all this, it was true. Still he had a great respect for Aunt Adelaide's love. He had seen the working of stepmothers in more than one family ; and his mind had in it the breadth of patience that can respect another's prejudices. He would not hurry her faith in Nelly's capacities ; neither would he burthen Nelly with so much in the beginning. There was a little selfishness in that. He wanted her time, her attention, and sweetness for the present. No one had ever ministered to him in this delightful fashion.

Ah, Nelly! you never guessed how miser like he treasured up every smile, every caress, and called himself an old idiot for so doing.

But, as he watched her there, he did not grudge the kisses. Something seemed awakening within him, tardily, as if after a long sleep. Had he ever felt the rapture over his children that he had seen men indulge in? And why? He would suffer physical pain for them, hunger, cold, labor, if need were. He would gladly take Bertie's place, and endure courageously the few weeks' suffering: why not that deep, exquisite emotion, that thrill of fatherhood? And Nelly there was playing at imaginary motherhood. He could see the soft flushes rise in her face, the struggle of girlish bashfulness, the fear of taking too much of another woman's child. If her own were in her arms, — her own as entrancingly lovely as that cherub of Mrs. Duncan's.

He rose to give Bertie some fever-drops. "Don't take me away!" the child screamed, clinging to her: so she held the spoon, and persuaded him.

Somewhere toward morning the stupor gained ground; and though Bertie moaned, and cried out occasionally, he could no longer distinguish between them.

"Now you must go to bed, Nelly," the doctor said, taking her in his arms, and kissing the tired face fondly. "There will be nursing enough after to-night; for I am afraid the poor little chap is not to get off so easily. If he is very restless, I promise to call you. Can you not trust him to me?"

Something in his voice caused her to glance up. Was there a new tenderness in his shady eyes? He flushed at her unspoken question.

"Yes," he said, "I may have been too well satisfied to have them crowded out. How did your heart fill with this tender, bounteous love, my darling? You shower it broadcast, as if there never could be any lack."

“There cannot be, since it is of God, who giveth liberally.”

They stood in silence for many minutes, then she kissed him good-night softly, and went away.

Like a dim dream, some sentence heard in an idle hour floated back to him, — “A new creature in Christ Jesus.”
What was this abounding faith of Nel’y’s?

15

CHAPTER XIV.

"Life counts not hours by joys or pangs,
But just by duties done."

DR. KINNARD'S words proved too sadly true. There was nursing enough in store for Nelly. By the next morning the fever had gained rapid headway. Dr. Searles came over, and found there had been not a little congestion from the force of the fall. That there was something besides, was painfully evident. Even at the height of delirium and apparent unconsciousness, he would scream if moved from certain positions.

The "den" was speedily turned into a sick-room. It made less going up and down stairs, and was a very quiet place at this season of the year; there being fewer office-callers for pleasure. Nelly had the kitchen at her command, and chance visitors also; and the doctor found it more convenient than an upstairs room.

Thus passed a fortnight in anxious suspense. Aunt Adelaide affected to disbelieve in the danger, and felt still more offended when piano practice was interdicted. Under other circumstances, no doubt but that she would have compelled the house to bow down to the illness of one of my "poor sister's children;" but now her injured dignity was paramount.

Mother Kinnard was quite frightened. Deaths and funerals filled her with nervous apprehension and dread. Something in Nelly's devotion touched her; and, in her secret heart, she admitted the child's own mother would not so have spent herself.

"Why should she not?" said Aunt Adelaide tartly. "Before she came in the house, Herbert never thought of disobeying *me*. It was the result of her foolish indulgence; and she ought to suffer for it."

"Stepmothers haven't the name of being indulgent usually," returned Mrs. Kinnard rather dryly.

"Any one can see that it is done for effect. When she comes to have children, 'my dear Bertie' will be pushed aside quickly enough," was the scornful rejoinder.

"Barton," she said one morning, stopping her brother-in-law in the hall, "there is one subject on which I want to speak. If Herbert should die, I believe you are his natural heir; but I think his portion ought to go to Maud. It was my 'poor dear sister's' money."

"Hang the money!" he flung out angrily. "Do you suppose I would touch a penny of it if I was starving? I wish there had never been a dollar! Never mention it to me again."

But Bertie did not die. He seemed to go to the very verge of the grave. There was one night when his father sat by him, administering stimulants, and counting the faint pulsation. His child! How strange it seemed!

He inherited his father's constitution; and the freedom of the year, with active exercise, had strengthened it greatly, for it had been somewhat injured by an injudicious childhood. So he came feebly back to life, lay wan and white for many days, dependent as a baby on Nelly's motherly care. She fed him, she bathed the shrunken limbs, read to him, or sang, watching every change in the pale face, so little now, so spiritualized, until she began to think him absolutely pretty: at least, he had his father's fine eyes, all the more noticeable now that the stupid look had gone out of them. There came into Nelly's heart an earnest sympathy, a tender love, a desire to fill a mother's place truly, and train the neglected

heart to better uses than the repressed and chilling years had known.

And the worst had not yet been confessed. For a while Dr. Kinnard had feared it; and, taking Dr. Searles into counsel, they had made a painful examination to find that the joint of the hip had been injured by striking hard upon it.

"And my poor boy will be lame for life!" he exclaimed with passionate regret. "O Bertie! if you had not been" — and then he checked himself.

That evening he confessed to Nelly the certainty.

"Oh! are you sure? Can nothing be done? Lame for life!"

Dr. Kinnard walked up and down the office with his hands clasped behind him, his brain in a chaos of unreason. Why should this be sent upon him? All his life, so far, there had been something, — a thorn in the flesh to wound him.

Nelly slipped one hand within his, and leaned her head upon his shoulder.

"Barton," she said softly, "it is very, very hard for you to bear, I know. And yet there is some wisdom in it that will be shown us after a while. I think you have begun to love him better; and this very love will bring with it a grace."

He took the fair face in both hands, kissed brow and lips, and she saw there were tears in his eyes.

"Let me comfort you," she cried. "Perhaps God gave me to you for this purpose. For the next few years he will sorely need a mother's affection and patience; and so I have found my work, my duty."

"And you welcome it? O Nelly! you have reached a height quite beyond me. I can only see the wearisome, disappointing present. Bertie was not a dull scholar; Mr. Herrick said so. I thought to take a pride in him as he grew older, — to send him to college, to give him a

profession, or establish him in business, to make a man of him; and Heaven knows there is sore enough need of true, strong men in this world. How can I endure" —

"It may not be so bad. Bertie is a child yet; and there is a hope of his outgrowing it."

"Hardly, if this should be a confirmed case of hip-disease. And, Nelly, it is weak, wicked perhaps; but I have a shrinking from all kinds of deformity and lameness. I pity any one profoundly; but I am always thankful that it is not mine. And now it has come to me. If I had listened, and let you take him home" —

Nelly had thought of it many times. It had been on her lips that first evening; but it seemed too much of a reproach to utter.

"You shall not blame yourself," she cried. "I am not quite sure that I wanted to take him. And we must not hurry God's meanings, or distrust them, but feel that there is something in this for us to study or work out for a new satisfaction. It is the part for to-day that concerns us: next year will bring its own strength. We have to do with Bertie's childhood now; and the man he will make will be such as pleases God, I hope."

"My darling!"

"Perhaps it will not be so bad. Is there no more experienced authority to consult?"

"I think I will go to the city. If any thing *can* be done!"

"Poor child, poor baby! for he seems that now, with his wan little face. What suffering it would be, and yet much better, I suppose, than" —

"Oh! I can't have him lame, and to go limping about all his life! Yes, I must go to New York. There are two physicians in whom I place great confidence. If an operation is possible, it shall be attended to without delay."

Nelly shivered.

“Little tender heart! Ah, at least I did one good thing, even in my own selfishness. I have given him a mother such as” —

Nelly placed her soft fingers over her husband's lips. She knew the rest of the sentence would have been, “such as he never had.” But, in her sweet and bounteous nature, there was no such thing as grudging another any due or praise, or gaining herself by that other's disparagement. And, somehow, she felt tender and pitiful to the woman in her grave, knowing now how she had missed establishing herself in her husband's heart; ever plucking fruit that turned to ashes, and hewing out broken cisterns, when the bread and wine of love's own sacrament was within her reach.

“You are right,” he said humbly.

A week afterward he went to the city, and returned with one of his old preceptors, now an eminent and experienced physician. If he had ever such a lingering hope of a mistake in his own diagnosis, it was dispelled. There was an exceeding faint chance of the child's outgrowing it, with a trifling lameness. There was a later operation, when he had more strength and maturity; but the disease would also have gained greater headway. There was the present operation with all its risk.

“The most important thing will be the care afterward. I should advise his being sent to a hospital, like St. Luke's for instance. Then he would have experienced nursing,” said Dr. Francis.

This opinion was imparted to Nelly.

“Could you not be as watchful of the case as the best nurse there?” she asked of her husband.

“Of course. But there are a hundred and one little things; and it will be a very heavy tax on you.”

“If I were the child's own mother, I hardly know how I should decide; but I think then, I should keep him, and try my best. As the case stands, I ask you as a

favor not to send him away. He will be nearer to us both, if we go with him every step of the sad way. If you have confidence in me" —

"I would trust my own life in your hands," was his vehement answer. "Confidence!"

"Then let us keep him. I should be sorry to have the world, or Aunt Adelaide," and she smiled with tears in her eyes, "think that I was glad to escape the solemn duties I took upon myself. And, if any thing should go wrong, we will not look back upon our decision regretfully."

"How generous you are, Nelly!" and he studied her in amaze. "Honestly, I would rather keep him under my own eye; but it is a great deal to ask of one young as you are. It may be a year or two; and here is your own life" —

"I am young enough surely to give away a little of it. Shall I not have you and your love to comfort and sustain?"

"God bless you, my darling!"

There was coming into his soul a solemn reverence for womanhood. True, he had seen it under many phases; but it is one thing to look at a flower in your neighbor's garden, without knowing all the particulars of soil and culture, and quite another to have it under your very eye, growing thriftily through shine and shade, dispensing fragrance and beauty day by day in the most bounteous manner. Nothing under his hand had ever so bloomed before. He had believed that nearness dispelled the charm; that daily using brushed off the pink of peach, and purple of grape; that household virtues thrive oftener in books than in daily life. Nelly's strength and sweetness touched him with a dim amaze; and he hardly dared place full faith in it, lest it should vanish.

For herself, she had become quite strongly attached to Bertie. She could see how much his training had injured

him. With a sort of moral cowardice he united great persistency ; so that, when he had once told what was not true, he was very apt to keep to the story, and impress it upon his hearers. His sense of injustice was very keen ; and the system of depriving him of every possible pleasure, of being always on the lookout for faults and naughtiness, of showing that he never, for a moment, was trusted, had worked much evil in the child's nature. There was another point in which Aunt Adelaide did constant battle. Bertie had a vein of humor and drollery that his aunt could not understand. She never made jokes, and never saw the point of them ; and repartee, she considered, for the most part, ill bred. All this she called impertinence, and punished it severely ; until the child, between ignorance and fear, had come to have a sort of half-stupid hesitation.

It was such a strange, new thing for him to be caressed, that at first he took it with a wondering, half-funny complacency. Miss Grove thought all such matters simply foolish, and declared that she always mistrusted people who were eager to make such a parade, besides the fact of its being under-bred. Her idea of manliness seemed to be stoicism. Unemotional herself, and living according to a code of formal rules that she had gathered from her very small world, she fancied, like many narrow-minded people, that it was adapted to age and infancy alike, to any kind of circumstances and position. Maud had never troubled her by any excess of feeling ; but she had been fighting the tendency in Bertie ever since his birth. It was her pride that the children had never been ill, and that they knew more than any children of their age. So that they behaved properly, what more was needed ?

Nelly had touched the deadened chords of the child's soul. It was so nice to be made much of ; to have his face and hands bathed, sometimes with cologne at that ;

to have his hair brushed, and Nelly had trained quite a curly crop around his white temples; to have dainty little meals served in the sick-room, just for mamma and himself; to be shown pictures; to be read stories; to talk in that changeful, discursive style so natural to children, without having to go over a sentence, and pick out all its needless words.

Not that the child had been transformed into an angel. He was fretful and impatient at times, and had restless moods, when nothing seemed to suit. Once, when he was much better, he proved exceedingly troublesome in this respect; and Nelly, finding herself tired, and with a tendency to speak sharply, bethought herself a moment.

"Bertie," she said in a quiet tone, "I believe you are tired of me; for what I do fails to please you. Now I am going out of the room for half an hour: look at the clock. You will be much better alone: so good-by for a little while." And she went away with a cheerful smile, shutting the door softly behind her.

Bertie thought he did not care. He was pillowed in a corner of the wide lounge; and for several moments he studied the fire in the grate, then his book of engravings, after that the solitaire-board; and, to his amaze, only fifteen minutes were gone. The clock ticked so solemnly, the cat *would* sleep on the rug; and there was absolutely nothing more to do. But then mamma would come in ten minutes. Oh, how long they were! He tried to count the seconds, and was quite sure there were more than sixty.

Through it all ran an undercurrent of conscience. There was no purely physical punishment or deprivation, but something that stirred his deeper feelings.

The door opened presently. "Do you want me now, Bertie?" asked the soft voice.

"I do, mamma, please."

She entered with some sewing, and drew her chair close

beside the lounge, saying cheerfully, "What shall we talk about, Bertie? You must have thought of a great many things."

"No: never mind about talking, mamma. I want to lie here and look at you a little while." Then, after a silence, "How pretty you are, mamma!"

She blushed, and gave a little embarrassed laugh.

"And you are very good to me, mamma. I thought — at least, people say" (hesitatingly) — "that step-mothers never are good."

"What do you think of it, Bertie?" and she raised her grave, sweet eyes.

"It isn't true. I'll fight any boy at school who ever says it again; and I'll" — But what *could* he do to Aunt Adelaide?

"No, my child: you can do better than that, — love me; love papa, and obey him."

"I used to feel so afraid of papa," he went on in a half-musing tone. "And I am not afraid any more. His arms are so strong when he lifts me. And he does care about me, doesn't he? They all said that he wouldn't love Maud and me any after you came."

"Which was not true, as you have found out by this time," was her quiet comment.

"Yes. Do you believe he would buy me a pony? And will I ever get well? I asked him this morning."

"What did he say?" demanded Nelly with sudden earnestness.

"That he hoped so. But why does my back keep so weak and stiff?"

He was to know ere long, They had decided upon the operation, as his general health was quite restored. However, nothing was said to him about it until the last morning. Ether was to be given. Dr. Francis and Dr. Searles came; and Nelly kissed her boy with a face that was braver than her heart.

“It’s dreadful!” said Mother Kinnard, who had softened unconsciously to Nelly; “and I am afraid it will not do a bit of good. I doubt if the child lives, anyhow. If he could only have minded his aunt! Children were not so disobedient in my day. I don’t believe Adelaide will ever get over it. No, do not go away: I am too nervous to stay alone. I feel as if we should hear, every moment, that he had died under the operation.”

It appeared to Nelly as if the inconsequent and unceasing chatter would kill her. How she endured it those two mortal hours, she never knew. Dr. Kinnard entered the room at last, very pale, and with lips that had not yet lost the force of their compression.

“It is through with, and was very successful,” he announced rather huskily. “Nelly, will you see to having a little luncheon?”

She went about it immediately, but did not question him any further. Dr. Francis afterwards gave her some hints and suggestions, ending with, “He may be delicate for a year or two; but I think he will recover entirely.”

And now began another siege of nursing. They tried to take care of Nelly, on whom so much depended. Dr. Kinnard insisted on her taking frequent rides, and having cheerful society. Daisy came to stay with her; and little Katy Berkman was found very useful. And thus Nelly Kinnard reached the first anniversary of her wedding-day,—a quiet but pleasant time with the home-folks, and Mr. Dudley, who was getting to be a great favorite with the doctor. Aunt Adelaide condescended to be quite gracious; and Mrs. Kinnard said afterward, —

“What a really delightful person your mother is, Nelly! I have a fancy, that, when she was young, she looked a great deal as you do now.”

Nelly smiled at the commendation.

“My dear,” said Dr. Kinnard that night, “I have had a

queer notion in my head all day. I believe I shall turn match-maker. I think Dudley is really taken with your sister. And what a charming clergyman's wife she would make! Though he is not very rich in this world's goods; but then your father is, without doubt, the very happiest man I have ever known. So it is not riches."

"I cannot have you mapping out Daisy's life," she said rather confusedly.

"But, since I have found a treasure, I am anxious to point out to my brethren the wonderful mine," he returned laughingly.

CHAPTER XV.

“The ordinary use of acquaintance is the sharing of talk, news, and mirth together; but sorrow is the right of a friend, as a thing nearer the heart, and to be delivered with it.” — BISHOP SELDEN.

THERE had been quite a commotion in the house with shopping and dressmakers, and plans for a summer tour. Aunt Adelaide and Maud were to go to Niagara and the Lakes and Canada, and wherever else their fancy led them. The large trunk was packed at last, and brought down to the hall, and beside it stood the smaller travelling-satchel for present emergencies. Maud was shooting up into a tall girl, and gave herself the airs of a young lady. Her father disapproved of it; but what could he do at present with Bertie still a burthen on their hands? In truth, Nelly was losing her bloom somewhat with this close attendance.

They said their good-bys at length, and were off. Then Dr. Kinnard bethought himself of what must be done for the others. Bertie had gone on well for a while; but it was evident that he, too, needed a change.

“I should try seaside,” said Dr. Searles. “And Mrs. Kinnard needs it also. The child’s limb is doing as well as can be expected; but five or six months of this would pull down any little chap, or large one either, for that matter. He must get his strength up again.”

To send them away! To part with Nelly! Why, she had become stay and comfort and pleasure to him. How had he ever done without her? How could he do without her now?

"Bertie, you are an unconscious rival," he said to himself in a half-petulant mood.

"The whole house must be rendered subservient to that child!" complained Grandmother Kinnard. "I don't see any sense in it."

"But it is his health, and perhaps his life," pleaded Nelly. "There will be so many after-years with us."

"Will there?" and a quaint little pucker came into the doctor's face.

The neighbors came in, and said their say. Here and there was recommended and discussed.

Mrs. Glyndon settled it. She had taken a wonderful liking to the doctor's young wife from the first; and she was one of those women with progressive, restless, generous natures, who wanted to bring all the lights from under the bushels, and set them on hills. She had no children, plenty of money, plenty of time, servants, and a husband who was indulgent, though he laughed at her a good deal, and was much occupied with various inventions, always having some poor fellow in hand. And then every thing came right in Mrs. Glyndon's way. There are some people fairly inundated by streams of good fortune, while others are left dry and barren.

An intimate friend said to her, —

"We are going to Europe this summer. Do you not want to take our cottage at Severn Point? There is a garden and stable, and plenty of room everywhere; and the house is well furnished. It is just a step to the beach, with excellent bathing and fishing."

She had been to the mountains and the springs, and was just wondering what there was to amuse her this summer.

A week after she had taken her cottage, while she was considering what guests or friends she would ask, she met Dr. Kinnard driving rather soberly through the town, and stopped him. How was the boy progressing? Would he ever get well? And how was Mrs. Kinnard?

"How fortunate!" when the doctor had mentioned the seaside plan. "You are just the people I was in search of! I shall drive straight out to the house, and when you come home to dinner it will be all settled. There, don't ask a question, but go industriously about your business."

She entered the house in her usual breezy fashion, having sent her horse down to the barn; and by dinner-time the plan was well digested. They should go to Severn Point with her. It was on the Sound, and easy of access by rail. They would keep house together, she taking two servants; and if Miss Endicott would go — it was so pleasant to have a young girl in the family! They would each take a horse and carriage.

Dr. Kinnard could pick no flaws for once. He could run down now and then, and spend a day or two, or Sunday; and Mr. Glyndon would be dropping in occasionally. Providence seemed to have thrown it right in their way.

"I shall like it so much better than either hotel or boarding-house!" said Nelly. And Bertie was quite elated with the idea of something different from the place where he had passed so much of his life. Mother Kinnard was equally delighted with the opportunity of managing the house, and taking care of her son.

"Is it any thing of a fashionable resort?" Nelly had asked.

"I really can't say, my dear. I was there five years ago, when the Randolphs first bought their place. It was not very remarkable then, as to style; but I have heard, now and then, of its improvements. There is a rather rocky point stretching out into the sound, and then a delightful strip of beach, without the usual glare and sterility of seashores; for right back of the point are some pretty farms, and a range of hills, which makes very entertaining driving. You cannot fail to like it."

So the second party made ready. Dr. Kinnard took them down; and Mrs. Glyndon was there beforehand, to welcome them. Bertie was tired with his journey, and fretful; and Nelly was looking quite worn. They were so glad to add Daisy Endicott's cheerful good-nature as a kind of mental balance!

But there was the broad Sound, with the monotone of the sea, and the bracing, salty, suggestive flavor, the ripples and swells crested with spray. The house stood on a little elevation; and you had the hills at the back; farms, and gardens, and waving trees westward; to the south, the long, level beach with cottages and hotels; to the east, the rocky point, that spread itself out to twilight purple in the distance; and in front of them the miniature ocean, dotted with vessels of various kinds. Besides the railroad accommodation, there was a steam-boat landing; and, indeed, it seemed quite a thriving watering-place.

"I hope it will give you all some color," said the doctor. "I do think you ought to have some one to help with Bertie. Daisy, will you promise to keep watch and ward, and send me word if she doesn't improve in a week? Every day you must go out driving. And Bertie, my son, you must not depend so entirely upon mamma. I am afraid you *are* spoiling him, Nelly: you are over conscientious."

Nelly smiled a little. All along she had understood how much more than mere physical care was needed.

They soon settled themselves in their new abode. It was indeed roomy; a great hall through the middle, that reminded her of home. Two rooms on one side were to be devoted to her; for, though Bertie could get about on a crutch, it was not deemed advisable to have him go up stairs. Opposite were reception and dining rooms, and large airy chambers above. Daisy took the one at the head of the stairs, so as to be within call. Mrs. Glyndon

had brought a man and two maids; so that there really was nothing for Nelly to add in that respect.

Bertie was delighted with the drive on the beach the next morning. Daisy took him out, while Nelly unpacked, and put her house in order. She admitted to herself that she did feel very languid. Six months of wear and anxiety told their story. Where was the blooming girl-face of a year ago?

Did she regret the service that had taken its roundness and color? No: she was glad to give it, to win the child's soul and the child's love, to awaken the chilled pulses into new life, to give him back to his father in glad surprise as something different and richer than before.

But she was thankful to have a little rest for a few days. There were so many objects of interest, that Daisy quite sufficed the invalid for the present.

Mrs. Glyndon returned one afternoon, especially important, her face radiant with pleasure and success.

"My dear," she began, "do you mean to get rested up, and ever have that pretty peach-bloom again? I want to see you bright and sparkling once more; for we are going to have just the nicest summer imaginable. I am so glad we came to Severn Point! I declare, it has all come around like a novel!"

"What has?" asked Nelly smilingly.

"Well, events — and people," with a little pause between. "Why, I have found a whole settlement of old friends! When I was in New York last winter, I just happened upon a charming clique, — two or three artists, some literary people, and some — shall I say strong-minded women? Not of the ultra type, though one of them is studying medicine, I believe; and another has a sort of professorship or higher teachership in a college at the moon, or among the planets. They are cultured and refined people, and up in all charming society ways. So, just as soon as you are in the humor, I want to give a

little tea, — rather Frenchy and enjoyable, with the best of it in talk. I hate crowds where people do nothing but stuff themselves.”

“You need not wait on my account,” returned Nelly. “I think I shall not care very much for society.”

“Nonsense! at one and twenty too. You need a good mental shaking up and rousing. I should think you would have grown rusty and dull; though, with that stiff Aunt Adelaide, and old Mrs. Kinnard, to say nothing of troublesome Bertie — No, don't hold up your hand in that threatening fashion: it is a pretty white hand, and I noticed it long ago. You do not know that Dr. Kinnard gave you over into my power, and begged me to keep you from getting dull. You must lay in a stock of roses and ideas for next winter. Perhaps Miss Grove will fall and break her back, (who knows?) and you may see a good opening to heap coals of fire upon her head, though be careful of her hair. It is growing rather thin, I noticed.”

Nelly laughed outright then, amused at her friend's manner.

“There, that is something like it. I am invited over to the hotel to-morrow to dinner. If you did not mind, I should like to take Daisy, she is so sweet and fresh, though she doesn't compare with you in looks. And then, as I said, I shall give a little entertainment here.”

Daisy was pleased with her invitation; and Nelly set about making her as pretty as possible. At half-past seven they set out, and then it was Bertie's bed-time. He said his prayers reverentially, and kissed her many times.

“Won't you stay with me a little while,” he asked, “since they are all gone out?” and so she sat by the cot, and talked until he fell fast asleep.

It was midnight when the revellers returned. Nelly had been lying on the sofa in a wrapper. She experienced an

odd, motherly feeling and interest in Daisy, as if she were a decade older, rather than three years. And, like a child, she came in to talk over her enjoyment. It had been just lovely.

“And the hero of the evening danced with her: I may as well tell you all her triumphs. There, now, not another word!—Mrs. Kinnard, you should have been in bed two hours ago.”

So Daisy was warmly enlisted in the tea-party. They made out a list the next morning, and wrote the invitations. Then, in the afternoon, they were to go to a beach picnic, and to-morrow out rowing, which would finish the week.

“And you’ll drive with me, mamma?” says Bertie in a glow of delight.

“Then you don’t love me best of all?” cries Daisy, making a dainty little *moue* at him.

“I love you a great deal; but I don’t quite think it is best of all. But then, you see, she is my mamma;” and he looks up, much relieved at finding so good and responsible a reason.

Down on the beach they go in the pony phaeton; and Bertie is allowed to drive. Jenny is as gentle as a roadside cow. There are not a great many out, mostly elderly people and young children, for whom the picnic has no charms, or forbidden ones.

Nelly sits there, and dreams. How long the time appears since she parted from her husband! She has heard, and all is going on nicely; but she misses him much more than she would like to admit. She has grown to love him very much, and he has come to depend on her for so many things. She wondered, a year ago, whether she could ever be useful to him, and, ah! now she is quite necessary. Oh!

It was all just like a flash. A stylish turnout, containing two very young men with a spirited horse, had borne

down upon them ; and Bertie, in the moment's confusion, had checked to the left, instead of the right. A hand had been interposed, and there they stood, quiet, out of possible danger ; but her heart beat rapidly, and her face flushed with that lovely, peachy glow so admired by Mrs. Glyndon.

"I am very much indebted. Allow me to thank you most sincerely ;" and she bent over a trifle to look at their preserver. "It was unpardonably careless in me."

"The carelessness was on the other side. Do not blame yourself in the slightest. I am happy to have been at your service, even in this trifle ;" and he bowed.

She bowed too, then glanced back, and found him doing the same thing, as often happens.

"How handsome he was, mamma ! "as handsome as — as you are. What was the matter ?"

"Let me drive a little while. It was nothing much ;" for she did not want to stamp the incident with any significance.

A handsome man, Bertie had spoken truly. Tall, supple, and graceful, abounding in the tints that are not blonde, yet far from the other extreme ; bronze-brown as to hair and beard, though at present he wore only a mustache, which was silken-soft and fine ; a clear complexion just a trifle sunburnt ; a broad, dimpled chin ; a straight, rather haughty nose ; and eyes of so dark a gray as to be nearly black. She wondered why she remembered him like a picture. It was not all gratitude ; for now she was not sure there had been any real danger.

There was an early moon ; and the picnic party did not reach home until after ten. Some one had persuaded an old colored fiddler to come down after sunset ; and the merry party had wound up with dancing on the smooth, hard beach.

"And Daisy is getting to be an absolute belle. She always begins so shyly, and colors up in the most tempt-

ing way ; and the men who are sick and tired of the last seven-years' blossoms are drawn to her like so many bees. And she deals out ever such a little bit of sweetness : if she had practised half a dozen seasons, she could not do better."

"O Mrs. Glyndon!" cried Daisy, in blushing dismay.

"You have the right of it, Daisy. — No, Mrs. Kinnard, there are to be no lectures in this house, but what I give myself. I am commander-in-chief in a direct line. — And, Daisy, youth is the time when you gather roses, and take pleasures, as you do sunshine. Don't ever give out more than a bit of sweetness : they are not worth it, — the very best of them. Just think of them as of the picnic to-day : that was very nice indeed, and there let it end. Something new will come to-morrow, it always does. But a young girl should be able to sleep soundly upon it, and not lay any greater burthen on her pillow than rolls off in her first-nap. Now run to bed."

Mrs. Glyndon lingered a moment to quiet any fears Mrs. Kinnard might indulge in foolishly.

"Innocence is the very best protection the child can have," she said earnestly. "She thinks she is not specially pretty, and that no one will be caring to fall in love with her : so she may as well go on thinking it, and have a delightful summer. To put her on her guard will give her an unpleasant consciousness, and make her suspicious of every thing that is said. Just let her alone."

Nelly thought of it a long while after she was in bed. She must be elder sister in turn, as Rose and Fanny had been to her. No, Daisy was not beautiful ; and yet how pretty she had looked to-night with that sort of fire-fly glow in her eyes, and her red lips full of smiling curves. But there were handsome and brilliant women here ; and it was not likely any crowd would flutter about this meek little dove. If only Daisy — but then Daisy *had* good sense. She had not been much elated over Mr.

Dudley's coming and going, and driving her to the village, or to see poor women, or a sunset here, or a bit of spring greenery and bloom there. No: she had taken it in that pleasant, friendly manner, enjoying, but not bothering her brains as to whether every word had a meaning. Yes, it was best so. Simple, sweet, and fresh, not made suspicious or worldly wise: if love came, welcoming it; and, if not, losing none of the fairer womanly graces. And yet she resolved to watch a little, that no enemy might creep in unawares.

Then the rowing-party came off; and Mrs. Glyndon insisted upon their both resting up, and using plentiful lotions of cream and rose-glycerine to be in nice order for *her* evening.

She had a "way" of doing things with a grace and newness that made you almost believe you had never seen any thing of the kind before. The shutters were all open, and the lights streamed about outside, while within came wafts of the sea, of the cool, twilight air, of the pungent, aromatic pines; and inside she had massed great bunches of grass-heads, and wheat and oats, and quantities of sweet-clover, that she had been half the day hunting up. And in among these feather-grasses she had placed half a dozen scarlet poppies; there some flaming lilies; here a few cool-looking ferns and meadow-daisies; and over there a great trail of old-fashioned woodbine, with its clusters of minute red trumpets, lined with a soft, yellow-like gold. The sofas and chairs were pulled out of corners, and looked sociable by themselves. There was a feeling of rest and refreshing. The company dropped down into little clusters, gathered into knots, rambled through hall and dining-room; for there was no formal table set. They laughed and talked, — sciences, politics, newspapers, new books, fashions, health, the attractions of Severn Point, of Newport, of Yosemite Valley, and Germany. Then the tea was brought in, and

diffused a fragrant flavor. The little tables were arranged here and there. The gentlemen carried the tea after Mrs. Glyndon poured it; and some of the younger ladies handed plates of dainty sandwiches, creamy biscuit, Graham gems, cake and berries; and after this was eaten, and the dishes taken away, which a light-footed servant accomplished without much clatter, the cream was brought in.

Early in the evening Mrs. Glyndon had brought one very noticeable gentleman to Mrs. Kinnard, and introduced him as Mr. Van Alstyne. They did more than bow: they shook hands cordially.

"I am very glad to meet you, Mrs. Kinnard," he said with a smile that was friendly and charming.

"And I hope you did not consider me ungracious a few days ago, when you did me such a — kindness."

"That is just what it was, and *all*," he returned pointedly. "There was no danger; only your horse might have started suddenly. And please do not imagine that I did any thing at all heroic. Indeed, upon looking at your horse afterward, I felt that it would *not* have been startled in a greater peril."

"Is that meant for a libel upon Jenny? She is the gentlest creature in the world, and very intelligent too."

"If she had been fiery, there might have been danger. And who was that pale little boy? — your brother?"

She colored and laughed, with a dainty embarrassment.

"It is my son, or, at least, Dr. Kinnard's son."

"Oh!" and he, in turn, flushed. But just then Daisy came up, and held out her hand frankly.

"So this is your sister?" he asked with a smile. "I thought some one said, the other evening, she was an invalid?"

"Mrs. Glyndon said she was not well, that was all. Will you have some tea here, Mr. Van Alstyne, or will you" — and Daisy glanced around.

"I should like to stay here, if Mrs. Kinnard doesn't object. This table is just large enough for two."

"Then I will wait on you," said Daisy delightedly.

They sat and chatted, and amused themselves by glancing around the room. Mr. Van Alstyne seemed to know everybody. That little near-sighted fellow over yonder was an artist who had made a name and fortune by having a picture put in chromo; and that tall, fine-looking girl was Miss Wilson, the senator's daughter, who had been publishing a wonderful book on entomology — studied under Agassiz; and that little dot of a Miss Howe was going to be a physician; and so on, in an entertaining and good-humored manner; telling bright little things, but none that were sharp or bitter, and making her talk in a piquant manner. Then young Conover brought his cup of tea over, because Miss Keith had rejected him; and Miss Keith came over to explain; and somehow, presently, Mrs. Kinnard's table became a centre of attraction. Miss Howe's father had known Dr. Kinnard. Wasn't it his little boy that Dr. Francis operated on last winter, or spring? and how was he doing? Everybody wondered just a little how such a pretty and stylish woman could make up her mind to be stepmother to any one's children.

After the cream went out, Mr. Transome played, then some one sang, and some one else; and Mrs. Glyndon begged Mrs. Kinnard to sing an old Scotch ballad she had heard her playing a few days ago. She would so much rather not; but everybody thought those old Scotch songs so wonderfully pathetic.

Nelly Kinnard had just the voice for them; and her pronunciation was so quaint, that all the little elisions and contractions and hard words were extremely bewitching. Then some one wondered if she did not know "Roy's Wife." That was a rather saucy, coquettish thing; but sing it she must.

George Van Alstyne stood leaning lazily against the door-jamb, watching her. He was eight and twenty, very good-looking, very gentlemanly, educated, accomplished, travelled; had run through one fortune, and was spending another, and had been *blasé* so long, that a new sensation was a godsend to him; but new women were generally bores. More than one society belle had tried her best, and failed to catch him; more than one little modest wayside flower had given him her heart to tread on daintily as one crushes a butterfly. And now the women who knew him best had come to the conclusion that he was not a marrying man: so he had settled into a general favorite. They laughed at him, and made much of him, and really admired his superb laziness, since he was never rude, but always exquisitely well bred.

Nelly sang, —

“But Roy’s age is three times mine;
I think his years they can’t be mony;
And then, perhaps, his canty queen,
Forgetting churl, will take her Johnny,”

and gave it the happy audacity of a daring, and not despairing lover.

It came into his mind then to speculate upon what Dr. Kinnard was like. Dr. Francis was quite an elderly man, and so was Mr. Howe. If they were all friends, and had been young together — what romantic folly could have induced this handsome girl to marry in that fashion, and devote herself to the pale little youngster? Yet he liked affairs and people that were out of the every-day common groove. He was beginning to think a fortnight at Severn Point quite long enough: now he resolved to take another week of it, and study this new chapter in womankind. As she was married, there was no danger — to her; and he never was in danger.

Mrs. Glyndon’s evening proved a perfect success.

Somebody wanted to know if she wouldn't ask them to tea soon again.

"I am going to have a dancing-party next, for the young people. I like to take in everybody. After that, I will consider."

"I am not going to wait for parties," said Van Alstyne. "Won't you take pity on me, and let me drop in to-morrow? I get dreadfully bored, and want a change."

It was quite flattering to have him ask in that spoiled-child way.

"Of course you can drop in. I will give you a card of admission for — let me see — a week. Then you will be tired of us. Good-night."

CHAPTER XVI.

**“The love that I have chosen
I'll therewith be content:
The salt sea shall be frozen
Before that I repent.”**

GEORGE VAN ALSTYNE came early the next afternoon. Some one had insisted upon taking Daisy out. Nelly knew now that this was Daisy's handsome hero of her first evening's entertainment; and she felt a little afraid of him where a young girl was concerned. Mrs. Glyndon was busy looking up dresses for tableaux: so she brought him into Mrs. Kinnard's sitting-room.

“You must take care of him for a little while,” she said. “My business is of importance. But it is too bad to have you so heavily burthened. — Bertie, don't you want to come with me for a change?”

The child was pleased; for he delighted in Mrs. Glyndon's chatter. Van, as by that name he knew himself best, dropped down into an easy-chair by the window, and loitered over a book of engravings. They soon fell into an easy talk, — so easy, that Nelly took up some trifle of sewing. Ordinarily he hated to have a woman do any thing, except pay attention to him. But he could watch the face as it drooped a little: he had an artist's quick perception of the harmonious lines of beauty. The rounded cheek, the delicate pink ear, the snowy throat, and symmetrical slope of shoulder, were worth a painter's study; and the white, slender wrist, with the tapering

fingers and soft palm — he knew it was soft by the tint of rosiness.

They discussed the city a little; and he told her of Paris, Vienna, and Venice. Bits of anecdote, legends, or a quaint verse, were happily interspersed, yet with no effort at entertaining. Then Mrs. Glyndon entered, and consulted them both about some costumes. — Bertie fidgeted, and whispered once or twice to his mamma.

“O Mrs. Kinnard!” he said suddenly, “don’t you go out for your drive about this time? Isn’t it that the little boy wants? Do not let me detain you. You have been very good to be bothered with my indolent self so long;” and he rose.

“Why, *I* am just ready to entertain you now,” said Mrs. Glyndon. “You need not feel compelled to go. — Bertie, can you not ring the bell for mamma?”

Mrs. Glyndon ordered the phaeton, and gave Nelly a commission for “down in town.” Then she carried off Van Alstyne; and Daisy returned before they had finished their talk.

She told him he might stay to tea, if he would drive her and Miss Endicott on the beach afterward; and so Nelly found him on the veranda when she returned.

That was the beginning.

“Don’t you worry about it,” said Mrs. Glyndon. “A week from this time he will be bored with us, and go somewhere else, — leave Severn Point, doubtless. In fact, *I* rather enjoy our conquest. I cannot decide to whom the credit belongs.”

Then Dr. Kinnard came on Saturday to stay over until Monday.

“Why, how blooming you look! he exclaimed to Nelly. “I need not ask if the place agrees with you. And where is Bertie?”

“A gentleman has taken him out. You see, we did not expect you until the next train, and I meant to drive

down; but this Mr. Van Alstyne wanted to take Bertie. and they were going to bring Daisy home. You will think him so much improved. He walks quite well without his crutch. O Barton, how thankful I am!" and there was a soft break in her voice.

"My darling, it is a good part owing to your courage and patience. I shall never forget that;" and his tone deepens with sudden emotion. "And you are happy?"

"Mrs. Glyndon is bewitching to us all. She makes it a perfect holiday. If you could only stay!" and she passes her fingers caressingly through his soft hair. "You are looking tired."

"There has been a good deal of sickness among the mill-hands, — intermittent, with bad symptoms. I am really glad you are down here, Nelly. Then Searles goes away next week for a fortnight, and I shall be busier than ever. But I do mean to have a holiday with you before summer ends."

Then she inquires about home-matters. "Mary and mother agree excellently," says the doctor with a rather amused expression. A note had come from Aunt Adelaide, leaving the travellers in good health. Old friends had dispersed for recreation; "and, of course, I am too busy to hunt up gossip." With that he laughs. Then a sound of wheels breaks their Darby-and-Joan confidence.

"There they come! Let us go and receive them in state."

"Has Daisy captured that handsome fellow?" is the surprised question.

"He is not the kind to be captured," laughed she, — "least of all by such a wayside Daisy. I have come to think him safe on that account. And he is a very entertaining companion."

"Remember that I put in a claim for Dudley."

"There is time enough," answers Nelly, coloring delicately. "Barton, I have felt lately what a solemn thing

it is to have a sweet young girl in your charge, to keep out worldliness and conceit and folly amid worldly and frivolous surroundings, and yet not thrust aside the true pleasures of youth."

"There, I will not have you borrowing trouble. I have great faith in the Endicott good sense."

"Papa, papa!" cries a joyous voice with a ring in it that the father has never heard in past days.

Mr. Van Alstyne lifted Bertie Kinnard out carefully, and Miss Endicott courteously, then touched his hat, and was about to drive away, when Nelly's voice arrested him.

"Do not go just yet, Mr. Van Alstyne. I want to present you to Dr. Kinnard, and thank you for the trouble you have taken."

"We went down to meet the train," explained Daisy, "and thought we must bring home a disappointment. Instead, you stole a march upon us. I am so glad, Nelly!"

Mr. Van Alstyne responded politely; but his gentlemanly manner did not prevent his taking a society measure and estimate of "that handsome girl's husband."

"How could the marriage have come about?" he mused in some curiosity, on his homeward way, having declined an invitation to supper. "Something on the Venus and Vulcan order, or Proserpine and Pluto. Queer alliances happen to ordinary mortals, as well as to the old gods. She was a minister's daughter; and he was the best that came to hand in a little country town, I suppose. She *may* imagine she loves him;" and there was an incredulous curl on his handsome lip.

"After all," he went on, "women are much alike, the world over. I do believe all who are capable of the grand passion have it once in their lives. She certainly is. What eyes! What a wealth of dormant passion, fire, and tenderness, just under the surface, that she never dreams of, but wastes her sweetness on that insensate

cub, who kisses her as if she was a china doll, and lings around her neck until I could give his a twist! The Endicott isn't bad, either, with her flavor of meadows and wild roses, but not to be compared to the other. By Jove, Van! you *have* fallen into fresh pastures."

They at the cottage did not need to think of him. Once in the sitting-room, Dr. Kinnard took Bertie upon his knee, and looked him over in strange amaze. There had come a gradual but great change to the child, and he realized it suddenly. These months of Nelly's winsome, gentle influence, began to bear fruit. The boyish roughness and ungraciousness, engendered in fear and repression, fell away like an outside husk, and disclosed a warm, childish heart. It had been a favorite sneer of Aunt Adelaide's, when he was particularly intractable, that this or that trait was just like his father. Nelly admitted that she was nearer right than she seemed. So many faults are but virtues gnarled and trained awry. And now a shaft of that sweet human love had pierced the child's spiritual being, making a tender radiance. A touch of moral bravery, a bit of unselfishness, a courteous little act done for her, and a careful avoidance of what she did not like. And when she saw him spring forward with a glad cry of welcome, or sitting, as he was now, half bashfully on his father's knee, there was no jealousy in her fine nature. She had brought these two nearer together; but it did not crowd her out. Love was not such poor brittle stuff, that it must snap if another laid a finger on it.

"He has improved wonderfully." But the words covered more than mere physical advance.

"And I can walk very well without any crutch. O papa! can't I throw it away?—the ugly old thing!" And the child looked up with pleading impetuosity.

"Not quite so fast, my son. We must not undo the good work by impatience."

"Mamma said I might ask you."

"We will talk about it next time I come. And you must always do just as she says."

"I do try, don't I, mamma? But then she lets me do so many things, and drive the pony too. It's just splendid!"

"Oh, my darling!" exclaimed the doctor when they were alone, "how can I ever be sufficiently grateful for all this care and good work? I feel sometimes as if you had given the child a soul. It appeared so terrible to me at first; but, now that it is so nearly and successfully ended, I forget the trouble, and see only the good."

"As it is right and best for you to do. It would be rank ingratitude for you to keep looking on the dark side, and thinking of the grief that might have been. God means us to enjoy the delight that he places right in our way."

"I begin to think he placed you in my way with a definite purpose;" and there was a sweet, solemn light in the soft brown eyes. "My dear girl, I understand occasionally that you have a wisdom of which I know nothing."

If George Van Alstyne could have penetrated the holy of holies in this wedded confidence, he might have found his opinion quite at fault.

Two delightfully happy days there were for Nelly. The doctor and Mrs. Glyndon had a spicy time. They always made war upon each other's prejudices and beliefs with gay good nature and freedom. He was satisfied with their pleasant surroundings, and tore himself away with great regret, promising to come soon again.

"I think he is as nice as anybody's papa," said Bertie confidentially.

The tide rolled back to every-day enjoyment. There were continual feasts of delight, — rowing-parties, when the sun was not too hot; boat-races, in which there was

much eager rivalry, the young ladies wearing their favorite's colors; driving on the beach, or through shady lanes; clambering over rocks; unearthing strange treasures; playing at science, for one cannot do much more on a summer holiday. The poets took their pens, and wrote idyls. The artists studied the changes of the glowing midsummer sea in translucent greens, from opal paleness to purple depths, or when the light reflected the azure heavens, and crested each wave with sapphire tints. Cool mornings, with a soft gray under-roof of cloud or vapor; brilliant evenings, when the setting sun seemed to melt and transfuse all that was magnificent in coloring. They discussed art over their cream, and the wonders of the deep amid their dances, and picturesque views from hill and hollow. Surely there was enough without playing fast and loose with human hearts.

Mrs. Glyndon's household had grown rapidly into favor. There was a bit of romance about Mrs. Kinnard and her lame step-son. Daisy Endicott was also in great demand. Her infectious frankness, her clear, rejoicing nature, so ready either to give or to hold, whichever seemed best; to fill up the uninviting corners of life's great harmony, and give them the same glory as if they were high places; cheerfully illumining the dull parts and out-of-the-way nooks that others disdained.

Old ladies said, "What a pretty, bright little body that Miss Endicott is! so full of life, and yet not frivolous, so different from society-girls! Why, it quite takes one back to one's own youth. It is so good to see a young lady free from the miserable vice of husband-hunting!"

The current set toward the cottage. The refined and intellectual part of Severn Point counted on these little teas and re-unions. Nelly, gracious and beautiful, moved among them quite a social queen. She enjoyed the wider talk, the breadth and freshness of ideas: she criticised with a delicacy and force that gave tone to her opinions,

formed, as many of them had been, in her father's study. There was a fascination in her cordial smile and the depths of her clear, dark eyes. In this world, truth is overlaid with so many disguises, that when one meets with it in the absolute glory of its simpleness, one looks about, like a man who has discovered a new and curious gem, and wonders what name it shall have,—as if God had not named it long before!

Mrs. Glyndon had also taken George Van Alstyne in hand. Some woman is always seeing the capabilities of these lazy, handsome fellows. She was not one of those reprehensible persons, a married flirt; but she liked a wide sphere, and plenty of people to manage. The half-dozen children that Dr. Kinnard suggested would have been admirable, after they had outgrown their unsatisfactory babyhood. She did not like helplessness nor ignorance, but wanted fully-developed material: to that she could have been mother, friend, teacher. So she said of Van Alstyne, —

“He wants a good sound shaking-up. He has talent enough for any thing. I do believe, if he was to lose every dollar, and be compelled to work for daily bread, we should soon hear something from him. But there! I daresay some one would rise from an unheard-of quarter of the earth or the moon, and leave him half a million. It's a shame when he might do so much!”

He liked the humorous, half-petulant, and wholly sensible scolding. He made himself quite necessary, assisting her with pleasure-parties, picnics, and home-entertainments. She took good care not to throw Daisy Endicott in his way. Beach rambles, and moonlight drives, plaintive little songs, and shady corners of the porch through drowsy afternoons, provocative of much reading of poetry, were wisely discountenanced,—guarded against rather than forbidden.

But he had been used to pleasing himself all his life.

without thinking of consequences. For him there were none. He never staid to taste the bitter draught, or waited for autumn frosts. Rather better than the majority of men, he fancied himself. There had been one brief gambling-fever in his life; and it had not proved a bad lesson. He had never run away with any man's wife, or betrayed any young girl. Low company of all kinds disgusted him: drinking and racing had no charms. Surely his was the "primrose way."

It must be conceded that his estimate of women had been formed, and perhaps not unjustly, from those he was in the habit of mingling with, — pure society-women; young wives to whom dancing, dressing, and flirting was the *ultima thule* of enjoyment, and who were glad to take in their train so refined and attractive a man. The other class were marriageable daughters, with managing mammas or *chaperones*, who were ready to tear each other in pieces for even a forlorn hope. He rather liked to be the centre of this rivalry. He laughed at the pains and allurements, the petty spite, the small stabs, and selfish triumphs of these young women. That he helped to lower them in his own and each other's estimation, never once occurred to him. He spiced his reflections with dainty bits of philosophy picked up here and there in his reading, — not of an elevating kind where the fair sex were concerned. He meant to have a good time, and plenty of what he called enjoyment.

He also had access to a higher circle, and found in it a degree of piquant pleasure, — women, who, from innate force of character, stepped out of the rigid routine of society. There was such a clique at Severn Point. He could discuss painting and poetry, medicine and politics, and the questions of the day regarding the social status of women. His reading had not been altogether frivolous; and his powers of observation were good, in the main. They looked upon him as a step above a brilliant butterfly,

but would never have thought of demanding a honey-bee's labor from him.

He had gone the round of simple pleasures in that far-back youth, when he thought a waltz with a handsome girl divine. But he must have some excitement beyond bread and tea. So he laid siege to Mrs. Kinnard's ignorance of her own wants and powers. She should learn that there was something higher and keener in the world than the pleasure of ministering to the wants and whims of a country doctor, and calling out her exquisite motherliness for this commonplace fledgeling.

And when she had learned her lesson — what then, Mr. Van Alstyne? When you had taught her to believe her present surroundings dull and narrow, her simple duties distasteful; when she aimed at greater heights of intellectual and psychological pleasure, and felt herself bound hand and foot, — what had you to offer her for her olden content, her unalloyed faith, her unstained sweetness? Ah, then you would say pityingly, "Well, she was foolish to marry such a clod; but, having done it, there is nothing but to abide by her bargain," and leave her to find her way back to the despoiled altar alone, if, haply, it might be found at all. Would she bless her fatal knowledge, think you?

As for her, she never dreamed of his speculations. He was an entertaining companion; but she did not even seek to make a friend of him. Their acquaintance would end with this summer idling. It was like walking through some palace garden; but she felt no desire to pluck blossoms simply because they were forbidden, and were for other hands. She had no small vanity to be elated. She had won the heart of one man, and was therewith content.

CHAPTER XVII.

“Such things, however, he used to do aforetime, also, he used to offer you a little of what he received; but he used to set before himself the greater part.” — ARISTOPHANES’ COMEDY.

It was a musical evening this time. The performers had been put down for certain parts, and were acquitting themselves creditably, without any halts or demurs. The audience were genially appreciative. In the pauses little knots and groups chatted gayly.

Over in this corner, with a portfolio of Hogarth’s satires between them, sat Mrs. Kinnard and Mr. Van Alstyne. She had done her part in singing, been very agreeable to some new-comers; and now, rather to her surprise, she found herself alone with him in a somewhat earnest discussion.

“Then you do not think,” he was saying, “that this soul we have been speaking of has a right to free itself from the customs and shackles of society, and live out a higher life, — one more true to itself?”

“Now you generalize quite too much, Mr. Van Alstyne,” she answered with a frank smile. “Isn’t being ‘true to one’s self’ a rather confusing term? What if the *self* were wrong? In such a case, would the life have any greater freedom? Would not the restless soul come to another bar presently, and fret against that? Do not people occasionally mistake restlessness for development?”

“But one cannot remain forever in the same old groove.

It is not natural or right. I hate people who fancy they are fitted, once for all, in some corner."

"But it *may* fit them;" and she glanced up brightly. "It seems to me a fortunate thing for the stability of the world, for progress even, that all do not want to change."

"But you would take away improvement. And pardon me, Mrs. Kinnard, but that does not seem like you. I have admired you in many things, I cannot help it; and one has been this very breadth and liberality of opinion."

It was most delicate flattery. His eyes vouched for his earnestness, if not his truth.

"What I mean is this, Mr. Van Alstyne," she said with the most direct simplicity. "There are certain known laws of right and wrong, subject to small modifications perhaps. But it seems hardly safe to me to stray out of the beaten path. When one begins to make new laws, there is no limit. Might it not be possible for these souls to improve under existing circumstances? Have they tried all in their own sphere, — all work, all prayer, all patience?"

He was not prepared to meet so important a question, and said, rather evasively, —

"Then you don't think anybody in this world is misfitted, out of place? I do, I can't help it. Neither can I blame them for trying to get somewhere else. They may make many mistakes before they find their true sphere."

A grave light filled her beautiful eyes.

"Yes: I have seen people whom I thought were out of place; but, if they endeavored earnestly and patiently to fulfil their allotted tasks, there was a heroism about it that taught a grander lesson than any mere personal enjoyment. Do you not think, when a person sets out to have happiness or indulgence at any cost, he may take that which is clearly another's? What is a strong desire of that to which some other has attained, but covetous-
as?"

“It might not be another person's.”

“But that was where we started from. This poor soul, seeing the richness and fulness of other lives, longs for liberty to get out of its sphere, to leave its duties behind, to seek pleasure wherever it can be found, — perhaps the very thing, that God, for some wise purpose, is keeping out of its way. I have thought sometimes, that when a person desires a thing very much, — a thing that others could see was wrong and improper, — God allowed him to attain it, and take the bitter consequences that followed in its train.”

“But it seems hard, when one has made a mistake, to forbid him to try again. Are you not a fatalist in happiness?” and he smiled with a dangerous, alluring light. “If it comes, well and good: if not, make no search for it.”

“Not quite. The trouble is in making it the chief good, in searching so restlessly for it. We are talking unwarrantably at an evening party, are we not? Miss Graham is going to sing ‘Three Fishers;’ and you must listen. And there is Miss Howe.”

She beckoned for the latter to join them. Van Alstyne bit his lip. Any other woman would have been delighted to keep him to herself. He was not used to friendly indifference on the part of the sex. And he wished she were not so horribly practical with her right and wrong. Why could she not compare and analyze feelings, emotions, even wishes, and stray to that farther verge where love trenched upon passion? Was there any thing intense or enthusiastic in her nature?

Provoked, he strayed off to another group. Daisy Endicott had been talking earnestly; and the flush was still on her face: her eyes had a peculiar, dewy softness. He was bored by the music, and in a mood of vexed desperation: so he brought out all his fascinations, and charmed her.

Nelly happened to glance up, and caught sight of Daisy's rapt, attentive face. She crossed over to them, and would have detached her; but it was not so easily done. He was a skilful tactician on his own ground.

"Can she be jealous?" he thought with secret exultation. "Is she like other women in this? If so, I hold the trump-card."

He had no fine scruples upon this point. It amused him to see one woman pitted against another. He had been good quite long enough. Not a single spicy flirtation this whole summer!

He was tired of these intellectual arguments, comparisons of old and new truths, intricate and toilsome reasonings, higher culture, mental progress, growth, evolution, and all that. He was here in the world to have a good time. A long afternoon in some blossomy nook, watching the color come and go on a woman's cheek, her eyes droop, and the lids tremble, the scarlet lip quiver with contending emotions, the white hands clasp of themselves now and then, as if they were longing for some other clasp — ah! that was worth all the metaphysics in the world for him.

"I don't object to the enjoyment of others: why should they to mine?" he reasoned petulantly to himself. "To show a woman that she has a heart is surely no great crime, so long as you do not win it."

But where did he mean the knowledge to end, and the experience to begin?

So far, Daisy Endicott had passed unscathed. While there had been much pleasure at Severn Point, flirtations had been kept in the background. Mrs. Glyndon was not the kind of woman to allow a man to drift into fondness for her. She had very little sentiment; and that was of the highest order. Nelly Kinnard would have blushed with shame at any one daring to esteem her in but one light, — that of Dr. Kinnard's wife. Her theory was:

that, in these cases, a woman must hold out some encouragement; and she experienced a pitying sympathy for those unfortunates who turned from ill-chosen companions to the dangerous sympathy and fascinating possibility that occasionally opened before them.

But in Van Alstyne's code there were no fine distinctions. That subtle understanding must flash out when the right souls met. They need not cause a scandal (he would be the last one to do that); but they might admit in their secret hearts, that, if fate had led them in different paths—

Would he be content to stay in this path with this or that woman? It was a question he never asked himself. To him there was always an outgrowing, a sense of further development. But if, on the other side, there was not this fatal changing? The most fickle man demands that the woman he loves shall be true to *him*.

It was an easy matter to be a little more to Daisy Endicott. They had been such frank, good friends,—this man of the world, and the simple-hearted girl. Why could he not let her grow and blossom for the one hand to pluck presently, to have and to hold forever?

It was only a deeper meaning in the smiles; the peculiar turn of a word or sentence; a choice flower; a bit of poetry, the pathos of which she could readily understand, and that he would hardly offer at any other shrine on account of its rare simplicity; asking aid and comfort in some weary moment, and showing her the despondency of his moods, while others believed he never had a serious feeling.

"She will be none the worse for a little experience of her own," he argued selfishly, salving thereby his conscience.

Opportunities, as I have said, were not wanting. Matters had settled into so comfortable a groove, that Mrs. Glyndon was no longer watchful. He did not mean to draw any other person's attention to his idling; and this

very fact was calculated to blind an unsuspecting girl. Daisy Endicott knew so little of the fatal craving for excitement; her life had been so healthful, her duties fresh and varied, if simple. Her affection flowed in natural channels, and did not need to tread daintily and daringly to the verge of danger. There was no continual introspection or morbid analysis: she lived daily in the "open sunshine of God's love," and was content.

Dr. Kinnard had made two brief visits at Severn Point, — one of a night's duration, the other a little longer; but he did not come for society. Nelly asked when they were to return home.

"Are you not happy and content here?" was his half-humorous query.

"Yes, both. But when I think of you in your lonely home, and with your pressing duties, I feel as if my place was at your side."

"Thank you, my dear;" and he drew her closer to his side with a fond pressure, though the grave little frown, that seldom meant any thing more than a puzzle, settled between his brows. "I may as well tell you the truth, Nelly;" and then it cleared up. "The fever at Edgerly has been worse than I at first expected. At times I have felt quite discouraged. What can you do when people are so afraid of fresh air and cleanliness; when they spread their beds as soon as they are out of them; allow all manner of refuse to gather in cellars, or lay festering in back-yards; who are ignorant of the first laws of health, and stick obstinately to what their grandfathers and grandmothers did under widely different circumstances? If it was only the poor and careless who sickened and died as the result of their own inefficiency—but these things spread, as they have at Edgerly. We are high, and out of reach of malaria; but still it is a relief to have you and Bertie away. I have less to think of. I can come and go as I please; and you may imagine that I am kept pretty busy."

“But your own danger! You think nothing of that!” she cried vehemently.

“My own danger is not very alarming,” he returned rather gayly. “I have not lived in this world six and thirty years without learning to take care of myself. Don’t make a bugbear of that now! I will promise you, that, at the first symptom of any thing like indisposition, I will rejoin you here. There, is not that enough? It would be cowardly to desert my post in my present robust health.”

“But does Mary keep you quite comfortable?” the young wife inquired anxiously.

“Mary is a jewel. Little Katy has been rather ailing: so we sent her away. I wanted mother to go; but” — and he shrugged his shoulders.

“You could not manage her as easily as you do me.”

“Exactly, Nelly;” and he gave a mellow laugh. “She is on the spot, you see, and will not go; and, somehow” —

He rose in the long pause, and began to pace the floor thoughtfully.

“Yes,” he went on directly, “somehow matters have changed between us. She seems to care for watching over me, and doesn’t fret as she used. Maybe I am more patient: I don’t know. Actually, Nelly, she keeps fresh flowers on the dining-table, and has come to have ways like you. It is very pleasant,” in a kind of dreamy tone.

“Very pleasant!” Nelly Kinnard crowded down something that seemed to rise with her breath. Another woman ministering in her place, standing in her stead, copying her ways, breathing soft and tender words, teaching him to miss her less and less? There was a quick, sharp pang — to be crowded out! Why, the child was not half to her that he was, — her chosen husband. Should she not demand her right?

She thrust out the foul temptation. If any jealous

feeling entered in, it should not take possession. God had made him a son long before human love made him a husband. She ought to feel glad and satisfied that there was some one to cheer his solitude.

She sprang up suddenly, holding out her hands with wordless entreaty. He took them with a little caress, then, infolding her with his arm, went on pacing the room with her at his side.

"Nelly," and a touch of emotion trembled in his voice, "I think your life at Edgerly has been thorny in many ways. I might have helped some of it at first, if I had known how; but I was afraid of making matters worse. And men cannot see with women's eyes, lucky for them sometimes that they do not;" and he laughed with a flavor of irony. "I have to thank you for a great deal of patience and sweetness: nay, let me go on. I had a man's fancy that I was marrying you all for myself. I meant that you should be troubled with no responsibility of children, until it pleased God to grant you some of your own. As for mother and Aunt Adelaide, what they thought was of small importance to me. But (shall I say it?) Providence" — and there was a reverential inflection to his voice — "has changed much of this. You have won a mother's sacred place in Bertie's affection, given him more tenderness than many mothers bestow. You have made him nearer to me: you have brought the solemn responsibility of fatherhood before me in its divine light. When I look back" —

She felt the arm tremble that clasped her so closely. Ah! could any thing shut her out of his heart?

He was not much given to talking matters over. She would never know just what this separation was doing for him, for her; how he missed her in a thousand ways that he could never have put in words; how he lingered over her courage and tenderness of the past winter, discovering the exquisite delicacy and richness of a true

woman's nature, thanking God with a strange humility for the rare gift vouchsafed to him.

In this softened mood, he turned to his mother with a sympathy she had seldom received before. A century of living alone with her would never have brought out his best points. She fretted and jarred too much: he withdrew to inward solitudes. Her stubborn pride would not have allowed her to soften perceptibly before Nelly; and even now she would have fiercely resented any suspicion of copying such an inexperienced young woman. But she did many things with no higher motive, it must be confessed, than to please him; and, in his changed mood, he was touched by these little evidences of affection on her part. People are not so widely separated as they imagine. Often the partition-wall is hardly more than paper, and needs but the right touch to break it down. These son-like ways were not as new to his thought, perhaps, as to the outward expression of them. There was no Aunt Adelaide to nip sentiment in the bud with ner cold sneers.

Dr. Kinnard bent, and kissed his wife tenderly.

"I think we shall find a smoother way in the future, little woman," he went on with an effort at gayety, hardly venturing to trust his voice further among the deep emotions of the soul. "And, when you return, I hope there will await you what you have not yet had,—a mother's cordial welcome."

Nelly gave the arm that encircled her a caressing pressure.

"You will stay, and be content? You will not worry about me? Have this much confidence in me, my dear child, that I shall not run any unnecessary risks. But it is hardly so bad as that."

Yes, she would have faith in him, not only in the matter of the sickness, but in others of deeper moment. Nothing should impair the sweetness of her trust.

And yet there were hours when she would have preferred toil beside him to the dreamy indolence to which she seemed condemned. True, Bertie improved every day. They resumed some of the discarded lessons, though it was more object than book teaching. She interested herself in household affairs with her gracious tact.

"My asking you here was a positive inspiration," Mrs. Glyndon would exclaim. "What could I have done without you?"

Mr. Van Alstyne remarked her pre-occupation. Did it betoken some secret dissatisfaction? She watched Daisy with a quiet but unflagging solicitude. Was it a touch of jealousy, just enough to make her piquant,—a fear lest he should prove too attractive? He felt strangely elated by either view of the case. If he could only succeed in rousing her to any thing! To see the fine dark eyes grow lustrous, to deepen the color on the beautiful cheek, or rouse the lips out of their placid curves! Why, he could have won almost any other woman's soul with half the effort—but, Mr. Van Alstyne, it would not have been this order of woman.

An incident occurred just at this time that served to heighten his interest in both, and hasten the catastrophe Nelly was studying to avert.

"I am going to send Dudley to Severn Point," said Dr. Kinnard in one of his letters. "He has worked himself out, and needs change and rest. Tell Mrs. Glyndon to take him in hand, while I prescribe negatives,—no sermons, no theological points, no plans for parish work, nothing but eating, sleeping, and diversion."

There had been a thinning-out at the hotels. Vacation had ended for some of the young men; and the ladies needed fresh pastures. Tableaux had grown tiresome; amateur concerts were on the wane; picnics with gypsy suppers had lost their charm. Indeed, Mrs. Glyndon's

evenings were the only entertainments that kept their piquancy and freshness.

"Mr. Dudley will be quite an excitement," said Mrs. Glyndon with a wonderful accession of interest. "Let me see — the Edgcombes will just suit him; and they have that delightful second-story room empty. Nelly, we must go over and see."

"That is the way with you women. You must always have some one new in your train, — a tame bear, or a pet lion. Will I be eaten up, or growled at?"

Mrs. Glyndon laughed heartily.

"Upon my word, Mr. Van Alstyne, it is odd to rouse you to such fierceness. Why, I thought you were asleep there on the sofa: so Mrs. Kinnard and I would be quite at liberty to discuss ways and means. And then he is Mrs. Kinnard's clergyman."

"Father-confessor?"

"Well — not exactly;" and Mrs. Glyndon gave a funny perk to her brows.

"So you throw me overboard. Well, republics are ungrateful."

"Why, no. But you were complaining of dulness no longer ago than yesterday."

"Was I? A man can repent, I suppose," raising his slow-moving, magnificent eyes. "I am tired of hanging around with hands full of shawls and baskets. The dew uplands are wet; the sun scorches you; and the gnats sting in the shade" —

"And the spray wets you, the dancing heats you, the driving bores you. You are a spoiled child, Van Alstyne. You have been indulged until you think the whole world ought to revolve around you. It is high time I took you in hand, and set you in your proper place."

The pretty assumption of motherliness did not in the least offend him. When Mrs. Glyndon said she scolded,

you might know of a truth that she was extra good-humored.

“Why, we ought to go this very afternoon,” she says presently, jumping up in a little fluster. “To-day is Friday; and Mr. Dudley will be here on Monday. — You can amuse yourself, can you not, Van Alstyne?”

“Oh, don't mind me! I must go and say good-by to half a dozen women who set sail to-morrow;” and he rises in a lazily-petulant manner while they are making their plans. Mr. Dudley's coming is not a pleasant prospect to him.

“Addio,” with regretful grace and ease.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"But had I wist, when first I kist,
That love hae been sae ill to win,
I'd locked my heart in case o' gowd,
And pinned it wi' a siller pin." — OLD BALLAD.

No, *J* was not a pleasant prospect. He hated to be pushed aside for any man: he was not used to it where women were concerned. He was sauntering along in a vexed mood, when he met Miss Endicott, her hands full of feathery grasses, and looking like a Watteau shepherdess in her wide seaside hat with its white frilling and cherry-colored bows.

"They are discussing Mr. Dudley, and will be out the next hour, hunting him up a domicile of some kind. So they don't need you, and I do; for I am in a horridly ill-humor. Will you not take a ramble down to the Point, good Samaritan?"

She glanced up into the handsome face with some indecision; but the entreating eyes and beseeching smile conquered it.

"I have been out all the afternoon with Miss Graham" —

"Then finish it with me. There, we will lay the grasses in this sheltered nook;" and he took them from her hand, slipping it within his arm. He knew well that taking possession was better than arguing half an hour.

On they went to the gray ledges of rock, where they could sit with the shining sand at their feet, and the

wide waters spread out before them. They were quite alone too. Out in the hazy distance, some fishermen were singing. The billows, crested in pale emerald and frost-white, came in like fairy squadrons on some enchanted quest. The pale clear sun went dropping down in the west beyond the distant town, shedding a softened glory, instead of his usual fiery rays. The sky was of palest blue with long sapphire streaks. Bars of dim yellow, faint violet, and delicate rose, crossed the golden background, and presently mingled into cool, dreamy gray, that left a peculiar luminous track on the waves.

He talked, and she listened with shy, girlish gladness. It was not so much what he said as his manner of saying it. She could not have repeated one entire sentence afterward; but the impression sank into her soul. She had a feeling that it would be delightful to stay here forever, listening to the caressing sweetness of his voice, that chorded so exquisitely with the twilight rhythm of the sea. And, after a while, it was all gray about them, — the purple and dun gray of coming night.

“Oh!” she cried, rousing herself, “we must go home. I did not dream it was so late.”

He started at the full, rich depths of her voice, — the tone that comes from a soul that has been quaffing draughts from Circean fountains. He had willed to be fascinating, to stir the depths of her nature; and he had succeeded. If he preserved that grave, brotherly demeanor, she would never know how near she had been to the fatal shore. Could he? It was only pastime, on his part; and he had gone far enough. Would he?

They walked slowly back. She was in too much of an enchanted atmosphere to be disturbed by any anxiety of what was to come. They found the grasses; and he went with her to the gate. Ah! after all, had he the manliness to let her go? — the soft, brown fluttering dove.

They said good-night. Then he turned. It was a cruel deed on his part.

"Daisy," he had always called her Miss Endicott before, — "Daisy, you will not allow this new-comer to crowd me out? I ought to retain some of the rights of a friend, surely." His voice sank to that low, entreating sweetness. "Promise."

"Yes," she answered softly, overcome by some subtle knowledge. Then he raised her hand, and pressed an eager kiss upon it.

She did not think, "He loves me." Her shyness and humility would have forbidden that until he confessed it. She was on a wide, delicious sea, satisfied to drift carelessly into port.

She opened the hall-door slowly. A softened light came from the dining-room, where they were at the table, with the addition of Miss Howe, who had "run over" to discuss her new plans. She was to go to Paris in September.

"Well, truant!" was the gay exclamation. "You and Miss Graham did not quite conclude to play babes in the wood. Oh, what beautiful grasses! Did you go to the hotel?"

"Yes," answered Daisy. Miss Howe's voice restored her to every-day life.

"Did you see her dress? Isn't it exquisite? You are not going to the hop? It is the last at Eastwoods."

"No," returned Mrs. Glyndon.

"You staid late," said Nelly gently.

"My dear Mrs. Kinnard, think of girls' confidences over new gowns! I remember of holding some lengthy ones a decade ago; and I am still fond of pretty dresses. — What were we talking of, Mrs. Glyndon? Oh, those French apartments! I think they would be pleasanter. We shall have Mrs. McLean to matronize us, you know. When I went before with papa, we were at hotels; but that was merely touring. Now I expect to live."

Daisy took her place, and ate her supper. Afterward,

she changed her dress ; for some one always dropped in. Circumstances, and not any design of her own, had given her a secret, too rare and precious to be brought out to common day. And with secrets begins danger.

Van Alstyne was over the next afternoon with Miss Howe, who teased him concerning a rosebud one of the ladies at the hotel had given him.

"I think you are envious," he said playfully. "Here, I am going to leave it to perish in Miss Endicott's hair. It could not have a better fate."

He leaned over and fastened it, hiding the blushing face in a friendly manner, and giving one daring glance into the frightened eyes.

"Why, Severn Point will be almost deserted when your party go," said Mrs. Glyndon. "What will you do?" and she turned to Van Alstyne.

"I don't see why I should rush off to the city amid the sweltering heat of August," he replied impatiently. "If you are tired of me, I might take a hunting-tour to the Rocky Mountains until New York gets habitable once more."

"Why, no: we are not tired of you," and she gave him a rather puzzled look ; "but I think, sometimes, that you are tired of yourself. Summer holidays are delightful ; but life is not all summer."

He shrugged his shoulders daintily. "It will be time enough to think of winter by and by. I daresay I shall astonish you, some day, by a vast amount of hidden and well seasoned talent."

"I only hope you will," said Miss Howe. "I know well enough that you could."

"For instance, when the divining-finger of love touches me ;" and his eyes wandered in a downcast manner to Daisy Endicott.

"Van Alstyne!" cried Miss Howe sharply. "A man who depends upon love for his redemption is hardly worth saving."

"Perhaps I am not. I don't know," he said with strange, sad softness.

Mr. Dudley came, according to arrangement. He was looking quite worn now. There was nothing in his appearance to compare with Mr. Van Alstyne, it was true; and yet his was a fine, scholarly face, with truthful eyes, and a frank smile,—a man who gave the impression of much quiet courage and persistence; who, though not lacking in energy, would win more souls by his tireless patience than by hurrying them out of danger.

They had to talk, first of all, about Edgerly. The fever had been worse than Dr. Kinnard had admitted to them.

"But he is just the man to take such a matter in hand," explained Mr. Dudley in a glow of admiration. "He did one good thing,—cleared out Hull's Row root and branch; and the whole block is torn down to make room for something better. Why, the basement-walls were thick with mould. The worst cases of fever were there; and, when three died in one day, the authorities found it was high time to bestir themselves. I wish he could be put in president of the Board of Health: he wouldn't go at evils with light kid gloves, I assure you."

Nelly smiled appreciatively. "I have been afraid all the time that something would happen to him."

"He has such a magnificent physique, Mrs. Kinnard! And then—didn't you leave a little of yourself in the house?" with a quick, questioning smile. "Mrs. Chase went away; and the doctor, you see, made me come out and spend the nights with him. It is all so different from what it used to be!—I can't exactly tell, but wonderfully enjoyable; and it made me think continually of you."

Mr. Van Alstyne felt a good deal annoyed at the "parson's freedom," as he termed it. In a fit of mortified vanity, he half resolved to go away. The little Endicott might get fond of him."

Then he discovered, with a man's sharp eyes, that

Arthur Dudley was not altogether insensible to her charms. No, he would stay and see the fun out.

The party had diminished so much, that Mr. Dudley and Mr. Van Alstyne were the only constant attendants. The drives, the sails, and rambles were to be taken over again. He had either Daisy or Mrs. Kinnard for a companion.

He used to fancy sometimes, that, if he had met her before her foolish marriage,—it was always foolish to him,—she might have been the one woman to awaken his ambition, and lead him in some useful path. He quite forgot the many brilliant and rarely endowed women who had crossed his way. Still there was something eminently attractive in her very directness, her truth, and honor. Even a friendship with her—there would be no breach of decorum in that.

Ah! her eyes were too clear. She had been trained, in her simple home, to finer reasonings than the picturesque imaginings of what might have been under different circumstances, or the so-called metaphysical distinctions that confuse vice and virtue. He was a handsome, attractive, cultured man; but his specious arguments had no more weight with her from that fact. His dangerous beauty could make no impression on this woman; and it stung him keenly.

There was a week or ten days of odd, under-current skirmishing. Mrs. Kinnard was throwing her sister into Mr. Dudley's hands, that was evident; and Dudley was going into the realms of fancy with rapid strides. But he could summon Miss Endicott back again. There was a subtle understanding between,—something that would have been quite indescribable on Daisy's part, had she wanted to confess it; and no pure, sweet soul like hers could have talked over a suspected love. It had not come near enough to isolate her, not even to set her thinking what this friendly tenderness on Mr. Dudley's part meant.

September came in brilliantly, with magnificent sunsets that made the sea a glow of fire. Dr. Kinnard was to come for a week, and then the household would break up; Mrs. Glyndon going on a westward tour with her husband. Nelly counted the days from no spirit of ungraciousness, but a positive longing for relief from the strain upon her. A thrilling fear had taken possession of her. Save Daisy she must, if she exerted herself to the utmost; and never had Van Alstyne made himself more dangerous. She had the strong safeguard of a husband's love, and her own honor; but how was Daisy to know the shoals and quicksands of this desperate tide!

This was what Van Alstyne liked. He could not understand her noble impulse; but he saw she was resolved to keep him away from her sister, even if she made the utmost exertion. It brought out the latent forces of her nature, many charming little ways that a society-belle might have envied for their dainty piquancy.

"I shall have one more entertainment," said Mrs. Glyndon. "I want to ask the Daventrys and the Maxwells; but I am a little puzzled;" and there she paused.

"About what?" asked Daisy, looking up from her game of chess with Van Alstyne, who was playing shamefully into her hands.

"I want it to be real charming, of course. If the Howe party were here, we would make it music and conversation; but the Daventry girls are extravagantly fond of dancing. Dr. Kinnard and Mr. Dudley will be here, and how to suit the different tastes" —

"Why, have every thing," said Van Alstyne, looking up with a glow of interest, — talking for the sedate, music for the sentimental, and dancing for such commonplace people as Miss Endicott and I. There! why do you not say 'check?' You may never have so good a chance again."

"You have not been trying in real earnest."

"And you consider me of so little worth, that you won't even take me at a game of chess."

"I—oh!" and Daisy blushed distressfully under the glance of the deep eyes.

"Yes, Mrs. Glyndon, that will be the best of all," he went on. "And then one of your dainty suppers."

"There is not much space for dancing; but, if I do undertake it, I want your very best assistance, Mr. Van Alstyne. No indolent indifference, mind you. I should hate to have a failure."

"We could open Nelly's room, you know," said Daisy.

"And have the band from the hotel. Why, let me see, next Wednesday, it will be almost full moon."

"Just magnificent! Now you have it all without any trouble."

"I think we might make it really delightful. And there is Mrs. Kinnard and Bertie."

Van Alstyne bent over to pick up a fallen chessman. "Remember," he said, "you are engaged to me for a good share of the dancing. Have you forgotten that my very first introduction to you was as partner for a quadrille?"

No, she had not. And she was touched by his remembrance of it.

They sent out their invitations, and everybody began to count on the pleasure. Afterward there would be a general dispersion. Even Van Alstyne spoke of taking a little run up in Canada.

Tuesday brought Dr. Kinnard. Nelly welcomed him with an hysterical cry of joy.

"Well, you see I am not worn to skin and bone by any means," he said laughingly. "I think I could go through another summer with tolerable comfort, though I prefer an autumn sandwiched between. But I am quite satisfied with you. Why, you are positively radiant. Won't you be ashamed of an old chap like me?"

"I am so glad to have you, so glad!" she cried with quivering lips.

"I do believe you are. No handsome young man has put you out of conceit with your old fellow? Come, I will not have any tears for my welcome."

They rambled together out of doors all the evening. Van Alstyne supposed her in her room, and was a little vexed at her sudden desertion, enforced, as he insisted it must be. Mrs. Glyndon sent both men home early, declaring she and Miss Endicott could not afford to lose their beauty sleep.

They were busy enough the next day, preparing, and adorning the rooms. Mr. Dudley brought in some branches of sumach, and clusters of scarlet maple-leaves. The weather was still warm; and the evening promised to be exceptionally fine. The band came, and was stationed on the balcony. The rooms were all thrown open; the guests began to assemble with most cordial greetings. Colored lanterns had been hung around, giving the house quite a gala appearance.

George Van Alstyne was in a most daring and bewildering mood. Mrs. Kinnard looked radiant to-night, and he meant to make her bestow a good deal of attention upon him, if he flirted desperately with Daisy Endicott to gain it.

And Daisy? She, too, was touched by the vague something in the atmosphere. A peculiar knowledge had come to her, like a blinding flash of light; and it had not brought happiness. When she first came down, Arthur Dudley stood in the hall. He turned for one quick glance.

Her soft white dress and white sash gave her a suggestive bridal look, relieved only by a knot of scarlet leaves in her hair, and another at her throat. The dewy eyes, the faint tint in the cheeks, the smiling, summer-ripe lips, and the fair, clear skin, made her beautiful as youth,

health, and happiness only can. Oddly enough, Van Alstyne had chosen her attire. She was tlinking of that. Arthur Dudley thought, "How fair she is! the one woman in the world for me. Does she know, does she guess, that I love her?" and then some fatal impetuosity lured him forward. He crossed the hall, took both hands in his, stooped and kissed her, and then would have given any thing to recall the hasty impulse.

"Forgive," he murmured softly, entreatingly.

She turned with a blushing face. Some one spoke in the hall above. There was a stir out of doors; and she was glad to escape.

There was no thrill of joy, rather a shiver of pain. And why? Last spring and summer she had liked him so much! Had these ten weeks changed her feelings? She was ignorant no longer. Her eyes were opened to that sweet mystery.

"But I cannot, cannot love him!" she cried to herself despairingly; and her whole being seemed tossed in a rebellion of unrest.

The guests were coming. She flitted from one to another: she welcomed with eyes that had never been so brilliant, in their agony of shame and pain. She must evade him, at any cost. Ah! here was a cool masterly voice.

"Come out and walk a little. Why, you are all flushed and heated: what have you been doing? There is your sister and Mrs. Glyndon to play hostess."

He led her down the steps. Nelly Kinnard saw it. What words of his could have so excited the sunny, tranquil-hearted child. Where were they going?

"What or who are you looking for, Nelly?" asked her husband.

"Not much of any thing," she answered incoherently with a nervous laugh.

The company gathered into little knots for talk, or to

look at engravings. Mrs. Glyndon moved among them with charming social tact and grace.

"Do you know where Van Alstyne has gone?" she asked suddenly of Nelly.

A sudden accession of color overspread Nelly Kinnard's face, and her eyes drooped.

"Isn't he in the hall somewhere?"

There were two shrewd eyes watching her. It was so unusual to see her evade any thing. She gave a quick, startled glance around. Dr. Kinnard was talking with portly Mrs. Daventry: so she slipped away. Ten minutes afterward that handsome Van Alstyne was in her train. Had she known where he was?

They two kept up quite a brilliant circle until the dancing began. Van Alstyne hunted up Daisy for the first quadrille. To-night he really danced; and it was a swift, beautiful tracery, winding in and out, curves, halts, steps, and swaying to and fro like some great shadowy bird. He let her go from him with a lingering glance; and his outstretched hands welcomed her back, claimed her with a sweetness and tenderness doubly dangerous. Nelly saw it all. Did he love her? but no. It was amusement to him — what to her?

Afterward he had Miss Maxwell for a partner; but Daisy was in the same quadrille. Then there was a gallop with him. It seemed to Nelly as if she could not endure it. And in the pause she summoned him to her side again. Should she warn Daisy? Well, of what? These other girls plainly put themselves in his way: she did not. Oh if the evening would come to an end!

There was another round of dancing, then supper, one of Mrs. Glyndon's elegant little feasts, with the first-fruits of the season, — luscious peaches, grapes in frosty purple bloom, pears in yellow with satin-smooth skins, or in russet crimson. Van Alstyne did his part well here.

Talking, promenading, and dancing. Gay little laughs

bright faces, soft voices, entrancing moonlight, and that stirring, passionate music that touched some chord in every heart, — a pretty, bewildering scene.

Dr. Kinnard missed his wife, and walked slowly down the balcony steps. He was rather proud of the admiration she had won, only —

Yonder in the path were two people, — Daisy and Mr. Maxwell. They came up slowly, and passed him. Two more were lingering behind, talking earnestly. Could it be? Yes, Nelly and that audacious gallant.

Dr. Kinnard stood quite still in a tempest of passion that sent his blood to white-heat. He had never before been jealous of a woman in the ordinary sense. He had seen his first wife waltzing in the arms of other men; and, though he had mildly disapproved, it had stirred no hot blood within him. But now there flashed over him a remembrance of Nelly's almost electrical nervousness, her restless going to and fro, her apparent delight in, and almost effort to gain, Van Alstyne's society, her embarrassment at Mrs. Glyndon's question, — a sudden, appalling, overwhelming flash, striking at and twisting his strength as lightning might an oak. All summer she had been here with that man, handsome and tempting as Lucifer himself —

Some one passed him; then another step, a fluttering dress, a pause — he had sunk on a rustic seat some moments before.

“O Barton!”

Two soft arms were about his neck. He shook them off roughly. “Don't!” he said in a hoarse, strained voice, rising.

She stood before him. The movement had turned her toward the light while he was still in the shade.

“O Barton!” she cried in sweet, piercing accents, “what is it?”

For an instant longer, he writhed in the grasp of the

foul fiend. Oh! he must believe in her, or life would not be worth the having. He knew then how a man could love; he realized, too, that the strength of their bridal tenderness was but a pygmy to this giant. He studied her face with a fierce, hungry eagerness. Could one line of it be false or weak?

It was very pale now, the eyes with a piteous, frightened look, the lips quivering, the lines tense; and she put out her hand in an uncertain way, as if groping about.

He took her in his arms, and reseated himself. There was a moment of strange silence between them.

"Nelly, do you remember our bridal day? If it were to be done over again" —

"Well, if it were," and there was a tremulous, crying sound in her voice — "I should be glad only that I might give myself to you again."

He pressed her closer. Could he, dared he, doubt? He understood now the immeasurable power of loving that he possessed. He was not a naturally suspicious man; but there was a certain degree of faithlessness in his temperament that had led him to question somewhat the entireness of the "divine passion." Not an hour through all this separation, but he had longed for her so earnestly, that, more than once, it had seemed quite impossible to do without her, even though important duties pressed him on every side. But his engrossing and single-hearted love demanded the same quality in return. Had she —

"O Barton, Barton!" she cried with a strange anguish in her voice, "what is it? Tell me what I have done?"

So entirely true had she been to him in her thoughts, that she did not even suspect what thus suddenly roused him.

There was a quick revulsion of feeling on his part.

"I have been an old fool, Nelly," he said with a grim sort of tremulousness in his voice. "Forgive me. It was all my own" —

How could he confess his suspicion?

A tremor ran through her frame. A glimmer of light dawned upon her.

"Barton, you did not think" — and there was a sort of hysterical tenderness in her tone, perhaps because she knew by that tight clasp how dear she was to him.

"I am afraid I did, Nelly. Let us have the foul fiend out now, and then bury him forever. I know you love me. Good heavens! to doubt that would be to plunge me to unknown depths."

"Was it because I was there in the walk with Mr. Van Alstyne?" she asked with a certain breathlessness.

"Not altogether. I may as well confess wholly. Nelly, I never knew you to *act* an untruth, even. But to-night when Mrs. Glyndon asked about him — and then you found him in a little while. Don't torment me, my darling, though I admit I deserve it. I know you can make a fair and straight story of it."

She was trembling violently now. It seemed almost cruel to ask her to speak.

"I will tell you just the truth. I did not know *where* he was; but I *felt* that he was with Daisy. Barton, I have come to think him a dangerous man for a young girl, or a woman who had no safeguard," and she paused to kiss him impulsively. "It is only lately that he has appeared to be specially interested in Daisy."

"I see it all, my dear, dear wife! How horribly unjust of me! What shall I do to make amends? Nelly, you must know how much you are to me, when" —

Perhaps she liked him none the less for his quick and jealous regard. She almost smiled now, and gave him a tender little caress that quite assured him of her forgiveness.

"And Daisy? But you don't think — why, Dudley cares for her, I know; and I hoped" —

"I trust Daisy does not care for him. It would be quite useless," with a great tremble in her voice. "Neither do I think this is love on his part."

"And has Mrs. Glyndon no more sense than to give that handsome and fascinating fellow the run of the house?" asked the doctor with much warmth.

"Mrs. Glyndon has managed beautifully. If you had been here, you would have given her credit for unbounded wisdom. She put him in his proper place, a society-man, who liked amusement, and was not of the marrying kind. While Miss Howe's party was here, there were several brilliant women, and every thing appeared so different! It has only been lately; and to-night he is like one bewitched. I felt that I must save her. We are going back so soon!"

"My darling, yes. I thank you for your truth and simplicity. I may be hasty and passionate, Nelly, when something rouses me beyond reason and judgment; but my faith in you is perfect for all time to come. Still I shall not forget that you might have married a younger and more attractive man; and that God means, in so bright and brief a season as youth, that one shall see things with enchanted eyes. I want to make you very, very happy: I may blunder in it at times; but it is my heart's desire."

"It is not all on your side," she replied quickly. "I have something to give and to do. And there will always be perfect confidence between us."

It was very sweet to think of, such confidence; not the mere gossip of every-day affairs, but the true magnet that attracted the higher nobility of love, the finest perceptions of spiritual as well as ordinary life, sympathies, tenderness, and mutual regard to the one grand centre.

She had needed him so much, that she would gladly have staid until the last light was out; but his practical mood recalled him presently.

“Had we not better return?” he asked in a half-regretful tone. “I suppose it is a crime against modern manners to make love to your own wife, while the state of modern ethics does not prohibit making love to your neighbor’s;” and he gave a dry, humorous laugh.

“We must, indeed;” and she rose.

The tide of enjoyment had begun to wane a little, or taken on a quieter tone. Groups were listening to the music now, with a pleased, languid air. Some one said, “O Mrs. Kinnard!” and she turned. Mr. Van Alstyne was talking to Miss Daventry, and there were half a dozen others around.

She stood there beside her husband in her glowing and serene womanhood, larger than any pure girl-life could be, no matter how beautiful. She was proud of his manliness, his strength, his simple justice, and, oh! above all, of his deep, underlying love. It never could fail or forsake, or grow exacting, through any narrowness. And Van Alstyne understood then the secret of her graciousness, the good companionship that could entertain a friend apart from any personal attraction, any exercise of self-love. A whole lifetime of the rarest and most delicate flattery would not cause her allegiance to waver. He understood then that she loved her husband as women seldom do, not a mere negative trust because they have found no strong comparison or temptation, neither the shallow engrossment of sentimental fondness; for she had been tried, and escaped quite scathless. He could not recall one smile: he had never even ventured to kiss her hand. Always she had been hedged around with that halo better than propriety,—the sacredness of love.

I ought to say it touched him and moved him deeply, and turned his wavering fondness toward Daisy Endicott, who would be hardly less to her husband. But the man was too innately selfish for any good impression to last

long. As his wife, a woman of Daisy Endicott's temperament would have died, in a few years, of mental atrophy. He would have absorbed all, and given nothing back, but kept himself for the world, society.

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CHAPTER XIX.

"How given for nought her priceless gift.
How spoiled the bread, and spilled the wine!
Which, spent with due respective thrift,
Had made all lives alike divine."

THE evening was not to close without another important incident.

Since his unlucky half-confession, Mr. Dudley had hesitated to encounter Daisy, although he felt that some explanation and apology were due her. He could not believe that he had entirely ruined his cause by his precipitancy. There had been a simple, girlish charm in Daisy's frankness through the earlier part of their acquaintance. He had treasured up many a little episode, and dreamed over it for the last two months.

The rides and rambles they had taken together, the times he had come upon her suddenly, ministering in Mrs. Kinnard's stead to some of her poor parishioners, the chapel improvements they had discussed, the books and pictures they both liked, the pleasant temper (he had seen it tried a little), the inspiring sunniness that would brighten a house so delightfully. Unconsciously, perhaps, one of the charms that rendered Dr. Kinnard's hospitality so beguiling was the fact that the house was still filled with her presence. He had watched her bending over this couch where Bertie had lain, her face full of genuine sympathy and hopefulness. Here the small, graceful figure had been half lost in a great easy-chair, suggestively large enough for two. Over opposite, she had sung

through dreamy twilights, sweet low songs, tender, plaintive hymns, that were enough of themselves to draw souls to Christ.

It would be worth one's while to strive for such a woman. How invaluable she would be in parish work with her ready kindness and homelike graces! How doubly dear by the fireside, when the waves of the troublesome world ran high, the sweet cheer and adaptiveness of her temperament soothing, adjusting, bringing bit by bit out of the golden treasury of the soul, that one might not be overwhelmed, or afraid to choose, or, on the other hand, stinted in any thing!

Yet he was not the sort of man to dream listlessly about love. When he felt the august power penetrating every pulse with its subtle vitality, when he realized how much fuller and more blessed life would be with her at his side, he confessed the truth simply to himself, and resolved to win her. He did not think much about his poverty, since he had youth and health. God would send labor and wages in the right time. From her mother she must have learned the cares and rewards of such a life, — the struggles and bits of rare pleasure, the toil and rest, the pain and joy following, and lapping over into one another like the seasons of the year, and of the going-on to riper days, leaving youth behind, yet not growing old, and of the kingdom of heaven from within.

So he went over to Severn Point prepared to ask her, expecting to come back a happy man, with a lovely household vision before him, — the holy duty of caring for her, of smoothing rough ways, of sheltering in his strong arms, of ministering to, and of receiving in turn, of rounding, satisfying, and slipping into rest and peace together.

They welcomed him so cordially into their midst! they brought out their olden pleasures, not grown trite with repetition. She was changed, in some way, — become

larger and richer, it seemed, with an ease and culture that served to make her more beguiling, not better worth the winning: that could never be in his thought of her.

He hardly disturbed himself about Van Alstyne. He had taken the man at his true estimate, as he had Daisy Endicott. He could see her on all sides, outwardly, and judged her with a more generous understanding than a narrower-minded man could have done. And he knew now how deep and fervent a reality his love was.

When she came down stairs so fresh and simply sweet, her face aglow with the radiance of youth and pleasure, propriety was swept away. He forgot the things he had dreamed over so often might be quite new to her, and took her in his arms with that spontaneous outburst of love, capable of making them one indeed, had their hearts beat in unison, — the caress that would have told all without a word.

He could not decide whether her strange, shy emotion, and her evasion of him all the evening, was displeasure, or delicacy. He was ready to blame himself with every breath; yet it had been so sweet to hold her there, even for that brief moment, that he could hardly regret.

But he felt there must be an explanation before he left, an apology for so disturbing the tranquillity of her girl-heart. He waited half-breathlessly, watching her as she fidgeted here and there, and struck by a strange sense of loss whenever she was out of his sight.

The guests began to disperse with cordial good-nights and many expressions of enjoyment. Some one was going now; and Daisy ran down to the walk for a last word or two. She surely would not be needed for a few moments. He picked up her shawl, — he knew it by the Æeey, pale-blue border, — came down, and, folding it about her, said quickly, —

“ May I detain you, Miss Endicott? ”

The suddenness and certain air of authority took her

so by surprise, that she had hardly time to start and tremble, before he resumed, —

“I want to ask your pardon for my rudeness early in the evening. But you must know what it meant,— that I love you, that I have loved and dreamed about you ever since you left Edgerly. The depth and force of my feeling swept me over the boundaries of propriety; but I am ready to answer for my daring” —

“Oh!” she interrupted with a sharp, sudden cry, out of which the joy had gone.

He stood still, catching at his own breath, bewildered, and quite at sea. Then he turned her round, and studied her face with feverish impatience, reading something more than mere surprise, — terror.

“Have I spoken too soon? Forgive me. I fancied you must know; for no man of honor could offer such a caress to a woman without” —

She saw it all in a blinding flash, — the love that lay at her feet. Two months ago, she might have answered him to his happiness. Why not now? What had come between?

In the same glare she saw another man. If he stood speaking, if his hand were on her arm, there would be a consenting tenderness instead of repulsion, a great joy instead of trembling pain and regret. Even now her cheek burned with shame at the remembrance of the kiss wherewith he had expressed his love. An overwhelming flood seemed almost to sweep her away from any secure mooring.

“Oh, if you had not spoken! if you would take it back — forget it!” she cried in passionate anguish.

He studied her face of pain and dismay. A brave man was Arthur Dudley; but this was like being swept from the spar on which he had meant to float to a promised haven. There was nothing else at hand: he had trusted the life of his affection to that. Still, if he must

go down, it should be bravely, not with any cowardly clinging to a woman's pity.

"Then you do not love me?" His incisive tone seemed to cleave the summer air, and let in a waft of arctic coldness.

"I" — she covered her face with her hands. It filled him with infinite sorrow as she swayed to and fro. "I am so sorry!" — in the humblest of tones. "I did not mean to mislead any one. Oh! what have I done?"

Her distress was so deep and genuine, that he was sincerely moved.

"My dear child," he said with all the comfort he could put in his voice, "it was nothing you did with any purpose. God gave you the lovely graces of womanhood, and you have not overlaid them with any false or meretricious ornament. It was my misfortune to see and to desire. But I am a man, and not blind, which must be my excuse. I see that I have surprised you greatly; but, Daisy, when you come to understand and realize how deep and ardent my regard surely is, may you not learn" —

"No, no! do not think of that!" and she wrung her hands with vague apprehension. "Not but what you are noble enough for any woman's love, only it would be cruel to — to hold out a hope that could come to nothing;" and she shivered as if in a midnight blast. "I am so sorry! Oh, let me go back to the house! They will wonder" —

"Tranquillize yourself a little; remember that you will always have in me a friend." Yet he paused to wonder if he could be friend again. He led her back to the house, and lingered outside while she mounted the steps wearily, his heart aching to assist her with his strong, fond clasp; but his delicacy assuring him that she would rather enter alone.

If he had spoken before they came to Severn Point

would it have been any better? She certainly had liked him then, given him a shy, pleased preference. He felt bewildered, pained, incredulous. There must be some mistake, surely. He would watch her to-morrow, and for days to come; and if he saw a sign of relenting, such as she must make if she felt she had been over-hasty, he would speak again. He possessed a rare quality of both patience and hope.

The guests had all dispersed when he went in. Mrs. Glyndon and Mrs. Kinnard were talking the evening over, after the manner of women. He said a quiet good-night, and then, as if bethinking himself, left one for Miss Endicott.

They were all tired, and glad to go to bed. Once in her own room, Daisy closed the door, and looked around in wild affright, as if she was always to be haunted by some distrustful phantom. She shrank from it with pain and dread. There came a piteous look into her eyes, a quivering about the tender mouth. Even now she could give it no name; but she felt what might have been the blissful perfection that could have rounded her life, but, instead, had left it flawed, roughened, scathed as if by lightning. With a sad prescience that had in it none of the delightful suggestions of hope, she looked into the dreary future, — a long life, perhaps, shorn of its keenest joy. And she could have worshipped so wholly!

After a restless night, she woke, at last, with a severe headache. Breakfast was late. There were no rigid rules in the household on this subject. Dr. Kinnard had taken Bertie out to ride before she came down.

“You do look really fagged out!” cried Mrs. Glyndon. “And you were so bright and fresh yesterday! I am glad of that, for obviously selfish reasons. Never mind: after the feast, crumbs, of course. Let me give you a cup of tea, and then you had better go back to bed. There is the rowing to Golden Rock this afternoon, you know.”

She should not go, she had resolved upon that; but she was extremely glad of a reasonable excuse for solitude. Dr. Kinnard teased her a little at noon, but desisted, when he saw that it really pained her.

"You had better stay at home, and be quiet," he said kindly. "You have had so many pleasures, that it will be no great trial to relinquish this."

"No," she answered with a tremulous smile, glad to be left with no further comment. For Arthur Dudley was to be of the rowing-party, oarsman, in fact; and she could not meet him just yet.

She lay on the sofa the whole long afternoon, in a mood of the most painful and bewildering uncertainty, revolving the endless tangle, and wondering what could be the conclusion, dreading it with great pangs of apprehension.

Just at dusk, the bell rang. She had been in a half-doze, and did not catch the inquiry, but heard the last of Susan's answer, — "and Miss Endicott is in bed, I believe, with a bad headache. Shall I speak to her?"

"No; don't disturb her. I will drop in to-morrow. Partings are the order of the day now; and I shall be off in a day or two. Give them all my compliments."

A great pang of agony and pain surged over Daisy Endicott. She buried her face in the pillow, — her shrinking, crimson face, into which the sound of that voice brought the blazing light of her secret. How had she come to love him (for it was that: she could not conceal it from herself), and there had never been any hope, from the first? Ah, she had not selfishly thought of that. It had been so delightful! — the low tones, the changeful and tender lights in the eyes (false lights to lure the unwary), the bits and fragments of sentences meant for her alone. And last evening — why, it seemed as if he had almost said — ah, *almost*, he had never meant to say it quite. And she had not thought there could be danger.

To-day he had come and gone, not caring to see her; and in a day or two he would go forever. Oh! how could she endure that bitter parting, the awful sense of loss? If she could see him occasionally, if there could still be some delightful hours of friendship. She would not ask any greater love. She had not sufficient charm to fill the whole life of such a man. If she had been made beautiful as Nelly; for he had been very strongly attracted toward her, that she had seen.

But her plain, modest life had in it no bewildering grace, either to gain such a prize, or to comfort in this hour of bitter loss and self-abasement. Some women would have fought fiercely with fate: she only accepted despair. The desolation must come upon her, must be borne. She was none the less Daisy Endicott. She had sisterly, daughterly, and friendly ties and duties in this world, and they must be met bravely. She could not confess to any one how she had been met and vanquished in the very outset of life; perhaps weakly, for she had been warned.

She rose, then, bathed her face, brushed out her soft, shining hair, put on a white dress and bit of cherry ribbon. Outwardly she was to be the same to every one. Then the family returned, and she went down, glad to have something to do, — to take up her burthen right away.

Arthur Dudley had been a trifle grave all the afternoon, though the short excursion proved a decided success. But he declined their friendly solicitations to come home and take a cup of tea.

"I am absolutely going to bed with the chickens," he declared gayly. "I hope you will find Miss Endicott better. To-morrow I shall give myself the pleasure of your hospitality, Mrs. Glyndon. — Bertie, don't you believe you could take me out driving?"

"Oh! couldn't I, papa?" exclaimed the child eagerly
"Mamma lets me drive."

"I think so."

Bertie came home, elated with his project. After a quiet meal, there was a little talking of the coming dispersion.

"I must go back on Tuesday, at the latest," said Dr. Kinnard. "Can you get all packed up on Monday, Nelly?"

"Oh, yes!" was the ready reply.

"Then we have two more days to devote to pleasure, Sunday to rest"—

"And Monday to a general disturbance of the spheres," interrupted Mrs. Glyndon merrily. "Well, we have had a bright, pleasant summer. Mrs. Kinnard has gone back to the enchantment of eighteen. Bertie has entirely recovered; don't you think so, doctor? Daisy seems to have had a young girl's good time; and I have been happy as a queen. We have lived together eleven weeks without quarrelling—what do you say to that for women's tempers?"

"Pretty good; pretty good!" and the doctor laughed.

Two more days of pleasure! It rang in Daisy's ears like the saddest knell.

Mr. Dudley came over the next morning, and went out with Bertie. Then Mrs. Glyndon kept him to dinner. Two ladies had dropped in also. Daisy's avoidance of him was not marked: he made it very easy for her.

Then, late in the afternoon, Van Alstyne made his appearance, with his usual jaunty, elegant ease. He made quite sure that the ladies were all at home; for he did not mean to risk any special rencounter with Daisy. Such partings were awkward things.

He had decided to go to Maine for a month, with a hunting-party, and was to leave to-morrow.

"I wonder if you will be in New York in the winter, Mrs. Glyndon. One does have a chance to see you occasionally. And it may be that I shall stumble over you

all, somewhere, again: I shall hope so, at all events. We have had such a delightful summer!"

He shook hands cordially with them all. Daisy's white fingers were cold and inert. He did not care to look into her eyes: the lids were downcast and tremulous. But he uttered the commonplaces of society over her with his serene and careless air; and they were separated for all time.

"I am afraid the little Endicott has been hit," he mused. "It wouldn't have done to go on for a day longer. However, I daresay Dudley will make it all right with her some day. By Jove! she's just cut out for a minister's wife; and she is a good little girl too. I'm glad I never did any thing more than kiss her hand. Van, my boy, you have withstood a good deal of temptation."

Saturday was marked by other partings. Sunday was lovely and tranquil, — a perfect day of rest, a golden life and glory in it, as if summer's richness just stood still, and ripened. Mr. Dudley took the service in the church; and Daisy listened to his voice with a peculiar tender reverence, as if, having once hurt him so sorely, she must make it up to herself with another kind of worship.

Then the packing, and the journey home, the mother welcome that had been promised Nelly, — a little awkward, with a sense of being unfamiliar, but pleasant in not saying or doing too much.

"And look at me, grandmamma! I am all well. I can run and jump; and I've had a first-rate time. I've learned to drive; and I am going to take you out some day. Mamma says I can have her pony."

All this with his arms around his grandmother's neck, where they had rarely been before.

"Why, Barton, how well he looks! And, I declare, he has grown quite pretty; something as you used to look." And she held him off to study him.

"Yes," said the doctor humorously: "my handsome days *were* in childhood, I believe."

They would fain have kept Daisy; but she wanted to get home, and shut out all reminders of the summer. So the doctor took her over, and brought back saucy Queen Bess, who was tall and straight, and full of rippling, girlish beauty. Bertie was puzzled to decide which he liked the better. Bessie was so bright and funny.

"If only there were no Aunt Adelaide to come in like a dismal gray shadow!" thought Mistress Nelly Kinnard.

CHAPTER XX.

But on the fire burns, clear and still;
The cankering sorrow dies;
The small wounds heal; the clouds are rent;
And through this shattered mortal tent
Shine down the eternal skies.

A CHANGE had surely come over Mother Kinnard; that Nelly saw presently.

She had been upheld in such a rigid way between Jane and Aunt Adelaide! We borrow more easily some influence or manner of our neighbor than we are willing to believe; and household frettings are so readily taken up: coldnesses and unkindnesses are grafts that flourish rapidly in a congenial soil. If we do not plant grain, weeds surely will grow: we see that all over. No inch of ground, no human soul, is utterly barren.

She seemed to have grown older too. There were more wrinkles in her face, a little softness and quivering in her voice, a sort of uncertain air now and then, as if she was trying to remember what came next.

She admitted to having been lonesome while the doctor was away; but, for the rest, she had not enjoyed any thing so much since her own housekeeping days. Mary was such a treasure! "And I hope you'll find every thing as you like it. I have tried to keep the house well aired and in order."

"It looks very bright and fresh, I am sure," was Nelly's reply.

And now came disastrous tidings. With some blush-

ing hesitation, Mary announced to her mistress that she should be compelled to leave, as she was about to be married.

“I’ve been very well satisfied, ma’am, and I hate to leave you and the doctor. I never thought I should get along so well with—everybody. But you see, ma’am, this is an old affair with Henry. When we were both young,—I was the older by two years,—he took a great fancy about me. I couldn’t have married him then, any how. Mr. Berkman was just beginning to come, and I liked him; and Henry seemed so very young at twenty. Well, his mother, she had word of it; and she made a terrible time. There was a farm that she had her rights in; and she was a very unreasonable woman, high-tempered, and all that: so she declared Henry should never bring home a wife; and he couldn’t go away, because there was no one else to till the farm. It didn’t make any difference to me, you see; and yet I felt very sorry for him. So she just grew queerer and crosser, and, finally, wouldn’t let any but very old women come into the house. He was a good son to her, better than many a man, I’m thinking. Well, last May she died. Henry came to see me soon after you had gone away. It was a kind of first love, you see; what with his mother being so cranky, it had never been quite taken out of his mind. He’s a good, clever, steady man; has a nice farm; and the old lady was a master hand to save, and make bedding. The house is full of furniture, and he’s fond of little Katy. I’m sure I hope we’ll have some children of our own: it would be such a joy to him. So I think, ma’am, it’s too good to let slip, since I do like him very much, and can make him happy.”

Mary looked up blushing at the end of her confession.

“I cannot blame you,” rejoined Nelly, “though I am very sorry to lose you; and I hope you will be happy

At all events, Henry will get a good wife. When will you want to leave?"

"Just as soon as you can spare me, ma'am. I told him I wouldn't be later than the first of October."

Nelly gave a sigh.

"If it wasn't for this, I'd stay always with you," said the faithful creature. "And if the farm wasn't so far—it's about a mile the other side of Kelly's Falls."

"And you will have your hands full," said Mrs. Kinnard with a smile, that she had some ado to make cheerful.

"I supposed as much," was the doctor's comment, when he heard it. "Henry Kline has been coming steadily all summer. Well, it's the way of the world. I set a bad example myself: so I cannot complain." And he smiled humorously.

Aunt Adelaide would be home the last of the month: she trusted all danger of the fever would be over, as she could not think of exposing Maud to it. Bertie recommenced school, though his father exercised a careful supervision over him. The fall cleaning and changes were attended to; the flowers put in train for winter blooming; and Nelly was as busy as a bee. Bess was bright and helpful, and a great comfort.

And then fell upon Nelly the first real sorrow of her life, so far. Rose's baby, that almost marvellous embodiment of infantile grace, beauty, and sweetness, sickened and died. Its short week of illness had not prepared any one for the loss: it did not seem, indeed, as if he could die. So Nelly went to her for a few days.

A month before, Mrs. Whitcomb had gone to Europe with a dear invalid friend. Rose and Stephen had given a rather sad but not unwilling assent. Surely Mrs. Whitcomb had earned this pleasure.

Daisy was to remain, and help her bear the pain and anguish. The first death in their little circle, the loveliest flower of all. Dr. Kinnard was profoundly stirred.

“I really believe I have coveted that baby, Nelly,” he said in a tone of deep emotion that thrilled her strangely.

But she had to return home. Here was Aunt Adelaide and Maud, — the first severely consequential; the latter, a good deal improved, but with many airs of fine ladyism. Nelly's heart sank within her. The pleasantness of life seemed suddenly dimmed.

Bertie's sleeping-room had been changed to one at the head of the hall, taking him quite out of his aunt's care. She treated him with a lofty contempt, and took every occasion to snub him. Mother Kinnard's half-defection angered her secretly. She was compelled to admit that she could no longer be prime mover of the forces. But there were many ways to annoy “my brother-in-law's second wife,” as she usually termed her; and none more effective than an almost insulting deference when visitors were present, indicating that she was in the house merely on sufferance, because related to the children.

And then began another great perplexity. Mrs. Berkman was married, and went to her new home; but her successor found it “so lonesome of evenings,” and wanted to go farther in town. There followed a list of incapables. The once tidy kitchen was a scene of disorder. Meals were irregular and half cooked, unless Nelly supervised every thing. The ironing dragged around all the week. One great brawny Irishwoman found the work so hard she couldn't stand it: “she woodent worruk her fingers to the bone for any one, that she woodent!”

Jane Ferris heard of it with peculiar delight. Mrs. Kinnard's good fortune had been a personal affront to her.

“I said they'd see!” and she tossed her head with emphasis. “But I'd never go back for a soul of them, save the doctor. I've seen ladies enough in *my* day to tell the genuine article when I do meet with it.”

However, no one asked Jane to come back. Mat was

almost as good as a girl to his young mistress, and very helpful. She gave up her rides, her books, her music, her village calling, and tried her best to fight it through. If she had only been alone, or if Mother Kinnard had fought with her! But that lady held secret sessions with the enemy, that were detrimental to a firm faith in her daughter-in-law.

How hard Nelly Kinnard worked all this time to keep her temper, and her pleasant household ways, no one but Him who seeth in secret knew. There were days when heart and mind and hands were so overtasked, that her husband's voice almost failed to charm; nights when she laid her throbbing temples on the pillow, and cried softly, so that he might not hear, out of pure weariness and discouragement.

It came to an end just after the holidays, in the person of a rather stolid German, who had been well trained, and was exceedingly good natured, though rather slow. But poor Nelly had not reached any promised land yet. Mrs. Kinnard was taken ill with fever and rheumatism; and, from that time until spring, there was nursing and amusing. Yet out of this came an abundant reward. She conquered here a lasting peace. Feeble, querulous, and oftentimes tiresome; yet the elder woman learned to love and appreciate her son's wife, to give her her due ungrudgingly.

Had it not been worth striving for? Two years, and two souls brought into her kingdom. Youth and age bowing down in simple homage, watching her with longing, wistful eyes, bringing her some first-fruit of love, trying to make smooth ways for the often tired feet.

Bertie paid his mother a chivalrous homage in spite of Aunt Adelaide's sneers, and would have thrashed any boy of his size who dared to breathe a suspicion against step-mothers. Mr. Herrick considered him a promising pupil; and he had become quite a companion to his father

Slow of thought in some matters, yet he had a quaint, droll quickness in others. He grew fonder of his grandmother, too, and was delighted when he was allowed to take her out to drive.

She had broken very much, and was quite an old lady. The rather massive chignon was discarded; and Nelly used to make a pretty coil of braids (for her hair was still abundant), and some becoming finger-puffs brought down on the somewhat too high forehead. A dainty little square of lace with a bit of purple ribbon, and a soft ruche around her neck, quite transformed her. She would always be tall, and rather severe looking; but the dark eyes had softened a little, and the voice taken on a gentler chord in weakness.

"I'm sure no daughter ever could be better," she would occasionally say to Nelly. "I never thought to be beholden to any one; but you have such a sweet way of doing favors, as if it was no trouble. But I know well enough a sick old woman is a burthen."

"Don't say 'beholden,'" and then Nelly gives her most beguiling smile. "It is such a hard, ungracious sort of a word. Am I not your daughter really, — Barton's wife?"

"Yes, my dear; and I've come to see the day that I'm thankful. I don't believe he was ever very happy with Mary, though I picked her out, and thought she would make a good wife. She was always sweet enough to me; but she had a terrible temper, and no pretty little ways toward him, as you have. And then I never can forgive myself, though it didn't do any harm; but I wanted him to marry Adelaide, if he married at all. One does dread stepmothers for young children; and I did not know any thing about you, except that you were a very young girl. But I am sure no one could have been tenderer toward Bertie; and, if he wasn't so large, you would make people believe he was your own child. It was all for the best,

dear; and I am sorry for the many times I must have pained you. You are quite sure you do not remember it against me?"

"Mother dear!" and kisses stop the garrulous, wrinkled lips.

"If you had not a sweet, forgiving nature, my dear, it would come up every now and then. But I shall try to make you happy in my poor way. You see I have only been used to doing, not loving; and to me it is like learning new lessons. And I'm like Bertie. I sometimes forget when I don't really mean to; but your sweetness sets it all straight. There's Barton's carriage; and you must run down to him. I can't have my son defrauded of any happiness, Mrs. Kinnard;" and there is a twinkle in her eye that stops short of pure pleasantry, because it meets with a tear.

Such bits of confidence have become quite frequent. And, when Mrs. Kinnard is well enough to get down stairs, she finds a delightful easy-chair in her corner, and her own workstand, as if she might have left it yesterday. Then, across the opposite corner, a luxurious lounge, and on it a pretty Afghan that Nelly has found time to crotchet, to throw over one's shoulders, if the room is chilly.

"It was such a bright thought of yours, Nelly, having this place altered," says the mother. "The sun and the flowers make it so cheerful! And I used to think flowers unhealthy,—the absurd idea! Why, the very sight of them is cheering, and makes a perpetual summer. My dear, it's because you have so much summer in your heart, I think, that your ideas are all so bright."

"Halloo!" cries the doctor with a genial laugh, as he comes in, and finds Bertie reading Kingsley's grand old fairy-tales aloud. "Why, this is quite a grandmother's corner, isn't it? I do believe mamma likes it better than she does my 'den.' I am quite jealous."

"The old lady has failed very much," says Miss Grove as she goes around making calls, stiffer and colder than ever. "She has grown absolutely childish; and Bertie will be good for nothing at all, she indulges him so. That child doesn't know as much as he did when his father first put him in school. He spends his time reading all kinds of nonsense. I always shall believe that novels and such things are very detrimental to any child. But, if they ruin him now, it cannot be helped: he is quite out of my hands. It is enough to make my poor sister turn in her grave."

Mrs. Woodbury comes to spend the day with the childish old lady, and finds her very companionable indeed; quite agrees with her as to the virtues of "my son's wife."

Rachel keeps the kitchen tidy, and sings at her work. Household matters go on smoothly; and Nelly is out once more, riding beside her husband, and receiving friendly greetings. And then she thinks how little she has seen of Mr. Dudley this winter. She has had the sewing-society, and one or two business-meetings of church-women to consider ways and means; for the chapel is getting over-crowded: but the good companionship of a year ago has vanished. She speaks of it now.

"Oh! that reminds me to mention—well, I'll drive you around to see it," begins the doctor, rather disconnectedly. But Nelly knows his sentences always join somewhere. "You know the Warners,—the new people who bought out the Chatham Mills? Mr. James Warner has gone in heart and hand with Dudley, and has offered him ground enough for a church and rectory, if he will build both."

"Why, that is magnificent!"

"Yes; down Arlington Avenue—the new end. It is a beautiful location. Dudley told me yesterday; but it went out of my mind. There has been something just a little queer about him. "Nelly, did you ever think"—And the doctor falls into a very brown study.

“Think what?” and her soft voice rouses him.

“That Daisy—well, I cannot make it quite clear in my mind. He was in love with Daisy last summer, if ever man was in love at all. Whether he asked her, or whether she made it clear without asking, as some women can, anyhow, I know he was quite down-hearted in the winter. And the other day I joked him about the rectory. His face flushed a moment; then there came in it such a look of intense pain, that I could have bit my tongue for punishment. I had really set my heart on it. But Daisy went off to stay with Rose, you know; and something surely has happened between them.”

Nelly looks grave. Daisy has shown very little disposition to come to Edgerly this spring. She has a new seriousness in her face, that appeared first during Rose's sore trouble: perhaps some experience of her own is blended with it.

“So the church is to be built?” says Nelly, trying to shake off a sense of pain that makes a discordance in the heavenly spring-air.

“There is to be a vestry-meeting next week, when the matter will come up. Oh! of course, it is as good as settled; and Dudley is just the man to carry it through. There, here is the spot! When West Street is cut through, it will be on the corner. The rectory will stand here at the south side. In time, the property will be very valuable; and it is a nice neighborhood already.”

“I am so glad and grateful!”

“If you would like to subscribe a hundred dollars, Nelly,—I thought we might each be put down for that,—and, if they get hard up next year, we might help them out a little then.”

“O Barton, how good you are!” and the tears are shining in her eyes; for her heart is very tender, thinking of Rose and Daisy.

“I want to be good to you, little woman,” he says

almost gruffly ; and then makes a pretence of clearing his throat.

A long while after, he breaks the silence with, "I can't get over it, Nelly. I have been so happy (thanks to your sweetness and patience), that I want Dudley to have a draught out of the same cup. Daisy and he would suit each other admirably. If they could only see and understand."

"It may not be quite as you think," she says tremulously. But, oh ! in her heart she is afraid of something sadder still behind it all,—something that comes just like a flash, and opens her long blind eyes.

They ride home in the soft spring twilight, winding in and out by the same river as when he brought her home a bride. The trees are in their first young greenish brown leaves and buds, the spruce and firs odorous, the meadows looking fit for fairy-rings. A blessedness springs up in the high places of their being : the flow of the river brings a great peace, a tenderness, a unison of heart and soul. To him it was a type of their close and peaceful affection : to her came a deeper thought,—a remembrance of the river that made glad the City of God. Would they both wander there ?

CHAPTER XVII.

"Oh the little more; and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!"

CIRCUMSTANCES had befriended both Daisy and Mr. Dudley in the concealment of their unfortunate episode. That Daisy should be a little tired and grave was not wondered at when she reached home. Mrs. Endicott never worried at her girls for any confidence or confession. If there was any thing to tell, it came sooner or later.

After a day or two, she exerted herself to talk about the many delightful events of the summer, — Mrs. Glyndon's perfect friendliness, Miss Howe's quaint originality, Miss Graham's beautiful voice, the rides, walks, sails, and the pleasure-parties, that were so entertaining to Bess and Gertrude. When she once began, she found it a relief to herself.

After the sad tidings, and her visit with Rose, no one questioned her right to a gentle sadness.

But she had not given up weakly to despondency. She realized that she had made a great and painful mistake. Her natural candor would not allow her to deceive herself. She had had a glimpse of a bewildering "might have been;" and yet it was not for her. She had loved this handsome, fascinating man unwittingly. Perhaps she would not have been so hard upon her own weakness, if she had known how he had tried to stir her girlish soul, what careful siege he had laid to her sincere innocence.

In the depths of her heart there was a hungry, unappeased desire to hear his rich and tender voice, to catch a glimpse of his ardent eyes, and feel all her pulses thrill and bound. There was such a wide, delicious possibility of love shown and withdrawn, like the blinding light we see when the heavens open.

It was like a death to her. If she had been compelled to meet him frequently, she must have schooled herself to a certain tranquillity, and uprooted all remembrance; rather it would have withered away for want of sustenance. As it was, she made daily pilgrimages to a grave. She would not allow herself to weep over the grassy mound, nor plant the daisies of pathetic tenderness; but still it was a grave, and in it lay something that had gone out of the world for her. God would give many other things in his own good time; and she could wait.

As for Arthur Dudley, he did not relinquish hope at once. It seemed to him that Daisy Endicott must belong to him some day, because she fitted so entirely into his life. He came home, and went to work with undismayed courage; but, as the months passed, he began to think there was a positive avoidance on her part, and a great fear thrilled his soul with a shivering pain. Once he had exchanged with Mr. Endicott while she was away.

The certainty seemed to gather itself into a vital pang without any further asking. The thing he so desired could not be. Instead of living in the very midst of breathless stillness and hope, he was in the outer ring of chaos. And he said then that he could not endure staying right along with so many remembrances of her, and not her own sweet, guileless self; that he must go away, and begin a new life.

Go away like a fretful child, because God had set one thing out of his reach? Refuse the daily blessings, and turn them from the bread of life into stone? No: he, of all other men, had no right to do this. He was to gather

up the grains from that exhaustless storehouse, God's divinely appointed ways, and inherit with that spirit apprehension other joys in the place of this one.

So a new courage and manliness took possession of him. When the boats and bridges are burned at the river's edge, the soldiers fight on: there is no retreat. Why should he be ashamed of loving a sweet, pure woman, even if she never came to gladden his life?

He threw himself heart and soul into his work, infused a new vigor and earnestness into every sermon, every prayer, even the reading of a hymn. People who had rather despised the small wayside chapel began to flock in; and its straitness overflowed. Then came Mr. Warner with his generous offer.

He had seen much less of the Kinnards than usual. Mrs. Kinnard had been so kept at home; and there was no reason why he should run out there every few days. But Dr. Kinnard's cordial and unspoken sympathy was very sweet. A kind of brotherly nearness was growing up between the two men who were never to know the divinely appointed kinship of blood. Their temperaments were widely different. This broad-shouldered, deep-breathing man, with his intense vitality, his hobby of clean, strong bodies for pure and active souls, his free speaking, had a common-sense way of taking up the great problems of human life, that sometimes bordered almost upon irreverence. His half doubt of religion as it was commonly practised, and his keen looking for fruit at the end of the season, were things with which he never disturbed Nelly. He used to admit to her that he had great faith in the Endicott religion, and smile to see her blush so distressfully.

To Arthur Dudley, God was a living, ever-present reality. He had that calm serenity, the outgrowth of a generous faith, rather than severe spiritual exaltation, though he often found solace in those high regions of thought and devotion. To him, the ever-present spirit

of love was nearest; a childlike directness to accept the promises, to take what was offered, without question or cavilling. He took the beautiful signs with thankfulness, and read the underlying meanings in the heart of the great Father. He was to sow with faith, nothing wavering: he was not to go outside the living pastures for strange gods or strange blossoms. But he did not make the bounds any narrower than they were set in the first instance.

So Dr. Kinnard was drawn into the church-building project "for Nelly's sake," he said. Mr. Dudley found his strong, practical ideas of much importance. He even asked two or three of his richer patients, who were quite inaccessible to Mr. Dudley, to subscribe toward the building.

"It will really be an ornament to this end of the town; and, the prettier it is, the more attractive it will be," he would say with his shrewd, humorous smile.

And then came summer, with its plans. Mrs. Ogden had one, and, with the new baby and the nurse, came to spend two or three days, and talk it over with Nelly. The new baby was a wee, sweet little girl.

Miss Lucy Churchill had gone quietly to her appointed rest; but it had made a great difference to those left behind. Not even little Rose could fill up the gap.

"I think it is best for us to go away, and have something quite different," said Fan, — "something that will take us out of our old groove. Aunt Churchill spoke of Martha's Vineyard; but that would bring back Lucy everywhere. You were at the seaside last summer; and you will want mountains this year. Mother, father, and Bessie and Edith, will join us. Louis Duncan, who is just in orders, you know, is coming to take papa's place for a good long vacation. Isn't it odd? — Louis is as much of a son to him as Stephen. Then Rose will come and stay with Daisy — poor Rose. I feel occasionally as

if I was taking what ought to go to the rest; for it does seem as if I had every thing, — quite enough to spoil me. So Winthrop decides for us. We are to stay right in the vicinity of the White Mountains, have a great roomy old-fashioned cottage and farm to ourselves, take our own servants, and keep house. Winthrop cannot spend all the time with us; but there will be papa and Uncle Churchill. And now, Nelly, if you will cast in your lot, it will be just perfect."

When Mother Kinnard added her fancy, it turned the scale.

"Why, yes," said the doctor, "I think you had better join, — you and Bertie and mother; and I might get off a week or two when Ogden comes up. The plan is really splendid, Mrs. Ogden. And Nelly has had so many household worries this year, that she needs a rest. She has nothing to keep her at home, either."

"Ought we not ask Aunt Adelaide and Maud?" said Nelly, when she was alone with her husband.

"It would be a daring piece of hypocrisy, little woman, for you know you do not want them. They would spoil your pleasure."

"Is it hypocritical to use every act of conciliation?" she returned with wistful eyes.

"I pray devoutly that they will not care to go."

And they did not. Maud "had seen the White Mountains, and thought a whole summer there would be stupid."

"And we have enough of them the rest of the year," was Aunt Adelaide's scornful comment. "Your father is so taken with the Endicott tribe, that he forgets he ever had any other relatives. I did not think your poor mother would fade out of his mind so soon; but *she*," with a bitter emphasis, "has worked for that end since the first day she entered the house. I hope she is satisfied. But there is not a bit of style to any of them."

Fan's visit was an unalloyed delight. She was so bright and gladsome, so full of winning and gracious ways, infusing blessedness in every little stream that flowed out; and there were many. And why not? God had given her all things richly to enjoy; and her father had taught her, among her first lessons, that she was to give as she had received. There was an exquisite girlish sweetness about her motherhood, something rare and fine, a little, perhaps, of the charm of her own mother.

But the baby was hardly out of Nelly's arms. Dr. Kinnard watched her with a strange, new emotion, as she hovered about it with sweet, caressing touches, or pressed the tiny pink-and-white face close to her own brilliant cheek, or smiled into eyes that were but half awake with a sense of living; the white robe clinging around her like a cloud, the soft coo and gurgle to which she gave an answering laugh, as soft in return.

If—and two years of wedded life had gone by!

Well, he had her; and that was no little. She should never know but what his content was supreme, perfect.

There was another bustle, and pleasant hurrying to and fro, eager anticipations on Bertie's part, and a sort of tremulous fear on grandmother's. Miss Grove went about loftily. Maud aired her small pretensions when her father was not there: he was very apt to take the breeze of vanity out of them with a touch of humorous sarcasm, which she always imagined she owed to her "stepmother's influence."

The journey was rather tiresome, to be sure; but the resting-place made amends for all, — situated in a valley (though that was high), with "the everlasting hills" above, around, at their very feet, even, speaking in tongues of grandeur, of peace, like a heavenly benediction. Somehow, Nelly liked it better than the restless, shifting sea, with its blaze of molten glory, and diamonded waves. And then she suddenly felt how much she needed rest.

A household that might have been incongruous but for the kindly love permeating it,—Mr. Churchill, still of the old school, with little courteous formalisms, that were akin to his low-tied shoes and his frilled bosom, an air of society before it had fallen into the free and easy ways of to-day; Mr. Endicott, with his gentle, half absent-minded demeanor, and quaint, rippling bits of speech, the same homelikeness out here on a grand rock as by the study fireside at home; and three grandmothers, two who were, and one who “might have been,” going down to a serene, beautiful old age, more of a mother to her sister’s son than his own, and, to these three babies, a relative quite indescribable; (she almost rivalled Mrs. Endicott; for was not Fan really and truly hers, from morning till night, lent out, now and then, for visits, as she had once borrowed her in the old days?) and then a “big boy,” such a thing as the Endicotts had never possessed before, past twelve, and at a very trying age. It often took all Nelly’s motherliness to restrain and guide, to keep him from teasing the little Ogdens, or leading them into danger, to make him courteous to his elders, to temper his frequent effusiveness. How much he did for love of her!

“Remember that you are to take good care of mamma,” had been his father’s parting injunction.

At first Grandmother Kinnard was a little stiff, and bristled up with some of her long-ago society-polish, whose tone and color had been set again by Aunt Adelaide; but it wore away gradually, and she began to take a more thorough enjoyment than she had ever known in her life before.

They were out among the farms. But a few miles distant were halting-places for larger parties, scattering hotels, boarding-houses, and wafts of patchouly and jockey-club to be stirred in with the scent of clover-blooms, freshly-cut grass, and the breezy odor of grow-

ing trees. And there were excursions for one, two, or three days, planned always by Fan in the most felicitous manner. She never had to stop to turn her money over, to see how far it would go. Up on the grand peaks, where one seems to get nearer the Infinite, to take great breaths of the feast prepared centuries beforehand, to read the writing that God's finger had traced in these signs of grandeur, a glory that quivered and duplicated itself in air and sky, that pulsed and trembled, reaching up and up, changing, undulating, widening, diminishing, brought close and revealed with an answering blessedness that entered the deep places of the soul.

They were scrambling over the moss and lichened rocks one day, half listening to some gay voices at a little distance, half looking to their own ways, — three girls and their father, — when a sudden turn brought them together.

“O Mrs. Kinnard!” cried some one.

“What an unlooked-for pleasure!” This voice was deep, rich, and familiar.

It was Elsie Graham and Mr. Van Alstyne, with a background of other people. For a moment Mrs. Kinnard was silent with astonishment.

“That we should stumble over one another here! Is Mrs. Glyndon with *you*? That would make it about even; for we have some half-dozen Severn-point people at the hotel. Allow me to introduce my friends, Mrs. Sherrard, Mrs. Payne, Mr. Payne, Mr. St. John, Mr. Mallory.”

Mrs. Kinnard recovered from her surprise, and introduced her party, in turn.

There was a general asking of questions. Where were they staying? What were they doing? And for all summer?

Mrs. Sherrard was a magnificent woman certainly. Mrs. Payne looked very plain beside her. But there was something, — too much of the flashing of silks and diamonds, too much of her in every way, from the bold,

black eye down to the shapely foot that made itself conspicuous.

They were all going up to the mountain-top. Both parties had brought lunch-baskets.

"So there is no law against our making a social time of it," said Mr. Van Alstyne, beginning to conciliate Mr. Endicott at once. The rest paired off; but Nelly kept Bess close beside her. Miss Graham joined them; and presently they fell a little behind. Mrs. Sherrard was laughing and sparkling with repartee.

"Isn't she just horrid!" exclaimed Miss Graham angrily. "And yet, you can't think, she has them all in her train, — everybody worth noticing. I don't see how the men like her so! You can see she is making a dead set at Mr. Van Alstyne; and I never saw him so — so" —

There was a bright red flush on the young girl's cheek, and a half-smothered fire in her eye.

"Captivated?" appended Mrs. Kinnard at a venture.

"Well," in a reluctant tone, — "though I don't really believe it. But at the hotel they predict it will make a match. She met him in the spring. She had just come from Europe, and had trunks full of elegant clothes; and ever since then she has followed him up."

A troubled light crossed Nelly's face. It pained her to hear this young girl discussing these matters in such a tone. She looked at Bessie in all her fairness and innocence, and wished that fate had not led them in this direction to-day. To change the conversation, she asked who of the past summer's friends were at the hotel.

"The Daventrys, and that Miss Ashton and her mother. She is going on the stage in the fall, with an opera troupe. Isn't it queer how we met? Mamma was so undecided about coming to the White Mountains; and I almost wish" —

There was a fretted look on the face that marred its youthful sweetness. It seemed such a pity. Had she,

too, poor moth, been caught in the net that looked so smooth and shining when Van Alstyne shook it out before women's faces?

"But it's just royal everywhere," declared Bessie. "I feel as if I could not get enough of it;" and she drew a long, delicious breath.

Miss Graham glanced at her sharply. Nelly noted the difference in the two faces, — one tired, and a trifle faded, with a little frown between the brows, and a sharp compression of the lips; the other sweet, fresh, noble, and with the peculiar graciousness of a generous nature shining in it. And yet she, too, might sip some poisoned chalice.

Presently Van Alstyne drifted back to them. Miss Graham's whole nature seemed to warm and change. She cared so much for him then!

By and by they reached a level spot, where they all sat down to rest; and the lunch-baskets came out, for it was past noon. The conversation became general. Mrs. Ogden's brilliancy was heightened by her fine breeding, though Mrs. Sherrard was witty, and had that peculiar something termed fascination; or was it a seductive aggressiveness? Her fine dark eyes were languishing; she put herself in picturesque attitudes; she dazzled; she smiled in the faces of her companions, showing pearly teeth, and tempting scarlet lips. Mrs. Payne evidently adored her.

Mr. Mallory and Mr. Endicott had a discussion quite to themselves upon geological formations. Nelly stole a glance at this wayfarer.

Six and twenty, perhaps, with a firm, vigorous but elastic frame, rather above middle height, and a certain slow grace in every movement. A face full of fine and kindly feeling; handsome, too, in a manly way, — quite different from Van Alstyne. His hair was a light, sunny brown; but the brows and lashes were much darker, and

gave the clear blue eyes a deeper shade. A broad forehead, firm and thoughtful, a kind of decisive nose, that seemed to strengthen the face, and a mouth that was arch and humorous, rich in kindly expressive lines, and not lacking firmness. Nelly felt drawn to him more than to any of the others.

Up to the top of the glorious mountain after that; but the additional party spoiled it somewhat for Nelly. They filled it so with littleness and worldliness. Mrs. Payne thought "mountains were pretty much alike, after all." Mrs. Sherrard had Van Alstyne's arm now, and was very effusive. Miss Graham was rather sullen.

Nelly and Bess seated themselves on a gray rock, and Mr. Mallory came and talked to them.

"What a delightful party you must have!" he said. "Your father was telling me about it. My mother and I have met your sister in New York, Mrs. Duncan: so I do not feel quite like a stranger. I wonder if it would be too great a favor — or ought I to ask Mrs. Ogden? — if I might drive my mother over some day to call on you? She is the loveliest old lady" — and he stopped with a blushing laugh.

"Why, we should be very glad to see her, if she will come," answered Mrs. Kinnard.

"You are most kind. To tell the truth, I fancy she is a little dull at the hotel. Don't you know that sometimes you happen to fall in with a host of agreeable people; and at others" — he stopped there, bit his lip, and ended with a bright laugh. "I think it must be because there are no old ladies."

"We have three," said Bess; "and one of them is just as handsome as any picture; and one of them is better than any picture in the whole world."

"And the third?"

Bessie blushed crimson, and turned to Nelly.

"The third rounds out the group. You can't have them all alike," said Nelly with merry audacity.

"I am quite curious to see them. The one better than a picture is" —

"My mother," answered Bessie proudly.

There was a sign of breaking up. They scrambled down the mountain-side to where the paths diverged, and then said their good-bys. Mrs. Sherrard had tight hold of Van Alstyne's arm. Mrs. Kinnard had given Miss Graham an invitation, earlier in the day, to visit her: so there were none exchanged now. Mr. Mallory followed them a little farther until they met John and the family carriage, and then said they might look for him to-morrow.

They sat in the moonlight that evening, and discussed the rencounter.

"I like Mr. Mallory," said Bessie frankly; "but there is something about Mr. Van Alstyne that I should never trust. He either does, or pretends to, like Mrs. Sherrard a great deal. And then he acts queerly towards Miss Graham, while it seems as if Mr. St. John was bashfully in love with her; and she snubs him. What tangles there are in this world! Now, I think I should like to write a book, and make everybody fall in love with the right person."

"Don't begin to bother your head about falling in love, Pussy," said her father.

"I? Papa dear, I have a premonition that I shall be your family old maid."

"So did Rose," says Fan with a laugh.

The next afternoon Mr. Mallory and his mother came over.

A handsome old lady, surely, — one of the women who are glad to be old, just as they were glad to be young, who keep the great joy of life shining through every thing. She had turned sixty now; was of middle height

and middle size, plump, fair, with pink cheeks, hair of soft silver that had once been flaxen, a dimpled face, a sweet mouth, and a wonderful light gleaming in the blue eyes. Her fine striped gray-and-white silk dress had two ruffles on the skirt, and no overskirt. Her narrow collar, and the edge to her sleeves, was fine point. Her silver-gray gloves fitted to a hair. Her pretty white chip hat was trimmed with black thread lace. An old-fashioned, ingrained rareness and purity, a clinging sense of fragrance about her, that was as delicate as if her clothes had lain in it for years, rather than any sharp obtrusiveness just sprinkled out of a smart scent-bottle. In her way, she was fully a match for Miss Churchill.

And, with her, her son shone out in a new light. The love that had grown out of her very life had returned to be her stay and support. She wore her grace of motherhood like a crown; and his sonship was not less beautiful to see, — his quiet, chivalrous attending, as if she were the “fairest lady in all the land.”

They sat out on the great porch, — some in rocking-chairs, some on the wide wooden benches, and on the grass-plot: they did not call it lawn. Essie and Archie were tumbling about; the baby was crowing in her nurse's arms; and Bertie was swinging in a hammock.

“It is worth coming to see, Eugene,” cried his mother, in a tone that was glad and sweet, like herself. “And now, friends, don't leave off doing any thing because I am here: the picture is perfect without any alteration. Just let me sit down in the midst.”

Bessie was on the step, crocheting with bright wools. Mr. Mallory found a place beside her, and they all talked. First it was of Mrs. Duncan (Mrs. Mallory had known the elder Duncan family), then Mrs. Endicott, afterward the girls, before she came to the grandchildren.

“You ought to be a happy woman with four such daughters,” she exclaimed; and there was a tremulous light in her eyes.

"There are two more at home, and a 'baby' somewhere," said Mr. Endicott. "Mother, where is Edith?"

"Seven!" exclaimed Mrs. Mallory.

"Seven," laughed Mr. Endicott.

"And I had four sons; but this is all I have now. God has been very good to you, Mrs. Endicott. I used to think I should like so to have a daughter. But, if I had not gone to him in my trouble and losses, I do not know how I should have lived. 'He brings us to the haven where we would be,' and just asks that we shall trust his promises;" and her voice fell a little, as one's does unconsciously when speaking of a matter very near the heart, yet long past. "But there seems no lack of sons with you, after all," she went on brightly.

Mr. Endicott turned to her with his soft, friendly smile.

Then the grandchildren were brought up; and Bertie came with them.

"She isn't my very own mamma," Bertie explained, in answer to some wondering comment; "but papa loves her, and so do I."

"You had a deal of courage," said Mrs. Mallory, glancing almost sharply at Nelly.

"She had what is better than courage," remarked the elder Mrs. Kinnard, in an almost jealous tone, — "goodness and kindness."

What an odd, charming, piquant call it was! An hour passed before any one thought; and at parting they urged her to come again.

"I am sorry that I cannot offer a like entertainment; but I have seen more charming people than there are at our hotel. We were thinking of leaving next week. However, I must come over again; for I have not half satisfied myself. So adieu for a brief while."

Fan, Nelly, Bess, and their father, went out to the gate. Mrs. Mallory nodded and smiled again.

"That is what I call running straight into a rose-garden, Eugene," she said to her son.

CHAPTER XVIII.

" All familiar things he touched,
All common words he spake, became to me
Like forms and sounds of a diviner world."

SHELLEY.

MISS GRAHAM brought Mr. Van Alstyne out with her when she came to spend the day at the cottage. She had offered him a great temptation in asking him; and he did not desire to resist it. But she was full of smouldering jealousy because he and Bessie had a few bright passages at arms, and once went off together to look at a bird's nest.

" I am very sorry for her," said Mrs. Ogden. " Why does she carry her heart so plainly on her sleeve? And one can only suppose that he is trifling with her. Does she not see it?"

" She was so nice last summer!" Nelly remarked in a kind of extenuating tone.

" Did he care for her then?"

" Not at all, or not especially. He is not a marrying man;" and Nelly paused to wonder whether Daisy —

" Then he has no business to entangle any woman's affections," spoke out Mr. Churchill strongly. " It is one of the most selfish and cowardly things that can be done. And women should try to frown it down."

" But too many of our modern girls take it as a triumph," said Nelly.

" And my opinion regarding Mr. Van Alstyne is, that Mrs. Sherrard will succeed. She is one of the kind who

always win when they make the attempt. I neither liked nor admired her; but she is handsome and witty. Did Miss Graham tell you she had been divorced?" asked Fanny.

"Yes. Then some one left her a fortune, and she went to Europe."

"She is rather too pronounced; but, as we do not care, we can let her alone."

Mr. Van Alstyne would fain have effected a familiar *entrée* at the cottage; but the Fates forbade. Then he grew irritated, and started off suddenly; but among one of the earliest marriages in the autumn was his and Mrs. Sherrard's. How she managed was a mystery. What the world did not know, was, that he had nearly run through with his fortune; and the fascinating widow was both rich and prodigal.

Ah, Daisy Endicott! all the after-years did avenge you grandly.

Mrs. Sherrard and the Paynes following so soon in the wake of Mr. Van Alstyne's defection, the Mallorys changed their minds, and decided to stay. There came to be a very pleasant going back and forth. Mrs. Mallory was delightful on further acquaintance. She had been everywhere, and seen so many notable people, — kings, queens, great generals, several remarkable artists and authors, — and had so many charming reminiscences to relate, that her days were really red-letter days. Her husband had been abroad on several governmental appointments, though Eugene was but fourteen when he died. She added to the quartet of old ladies a wonderful grace and interest; and Mr. Mallory soon made himself a favorite. Yet they could not be blind. Some day papa would have to say, "And this one also."

But no one spoke or jested. It seemed an almost holy thing that this young girl should go so simply forward to her fate, neither dreading, expecting, nor desiring, until

the day came when her eyes should be opened with love's own rosy, beneficent touch. No glare of ball-rooms, no heat and flush of dancing, rivalry, and excitement, no crowd of society-people, anxious to tear off the garment of simplicity, and make her as worldly-wise as themselves, and dim the purity of face and heart; little family conventions rather, a whole group gathered out on the porch, or under the trees; Bessie playing with a baby, or doing a bit of bright fancy-work, which was her passion. Somewhere near her lingered Mr. Mallory. She fell into a fashion of referring to him, of asking him questions, sending him on trifling errands that would not take him out of sight, and thanking him with such a bewitching grace. She was piquant and flashing, rather than shy; but with her it was the bravery of entire innocence, rather than any approach to boldness. Her admiration of Mr. Mallory was very outspoken — just as she admired her father or Dr. Kinnard.

“If I were a French woman, Mr. Endicott,” said Mrs. Mallory one day, “I should ask your daughter for my son. In some things, we might study our neighbors to an advantage. Their children have not altogether outgrown filial affection or reverence; and certainly, the first part of courtship does not need secrecy and affectation, as if it was a thing to be thrust out of sight. He has met many women; but so far I have been his most intimate friend. He is quite worthy of your daughter, and that is saying a great deal; for I have seen no person until now that I coveted for him. You need not fear aught but the most motherly welcome for her.”

“She is so young!” faltered the father, with a secret pang at seeing his household-nest thus despoiled of its treasures.

“Mr. Endicott, I was sixteen when I married” (and in her more earnest tones there was a not unmusical sharpness, like a sweet-toned bell wildly shaken, that

somehow thrilled you), "and my husband died a little more than twelve years ago. All that time was not a day too long. I would not give up one hour's remembrance now, for a mint of gold. If my son makes as good a husband" — and a tear trembled in the lustrous eye.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Endicott hurriedly, clasping the soft, dimpled hand.

"And now the rest they can settle for themselves," she made answer with a smile.

There came to be a sweet and gracious rivalry among these old ladies, — a bringing-out of what was best and kindest, just as they wore their pretty laces, fine quaint lawns, with suggestions of other summers in them, and their rich, soft silks. And Nelly could not see her family grandmother fall behind. A touch added here to-day, and there to-morrow, softening and refining; an act of tender respect or graceful deference that roused the very springs of her nature, though they had been quite choked with the *débris* of other years. She used to go to ride with Bertie with a glad, proud air, as if she discerned the grace in her grandson, and appreciated it.

Dr. Kinnard and Winthrop Ogden were added to the party presently; and there followed a fortnight of wholesome, delightful enjoyment, — a fresh, live meaning in every thing for them, from the mountain-tops at noon, to the suppers in the twilight; from the splendor of a sunset to the bits and fragments of every-day life.

"I seem to realize more and more how we are giving up our places to others," Miss Churchill said to Mrs. Endicott. "We bring out the old-fashioned carnations that were the great things of our day; and the new generation cultivate them into largeness and richness, though they can't make them much sweeter," with her grand smile. "But it is all right. If we had not labored, they might have no carnations to improve upon."

“And so my pretty Queen Bess has been captured in my absence,” said Dr. Kinnard to his wife in a rather disconsolate tone. “And she is to ‘shine down’ all you girls, even Mrs. Fan. Stephen Duncan was speaking of them. There is almost no end to Mrs. Mallory’s wealth. She was one of the Livingstons, and inherited two or three fortunes in her own right. Now, if Bess had been tricked out in silks and diamonds, and gone to Newport or Saratoga” —

“Are you quite sure?” exclaimed Nelly, aghast at so overwhelming a prospect. “Why, we never thought — I wonder that some of the girls at the hotel didn’t prefer him to Mr. Van Alstyne, whom they all seemed so bewitched about.”

Nelly had kept that brief episode to confess personally, rather than trust it to a letter. But her husband had no fears now: “his heart safely trusted her.”

“Young women may not always know;” and he shrugged his broad shoulders with a touch of humor. “But, if Bess had not liked him, twice that money would not have tempted her. I lay the flattering unction to my soul, that my money did not tempt you,” with a funny little laugh.

“Nelly,” he said later, “I cannot understand the marvellous change you have worked in mother. She is so much softer and kinder and more gracious; and you make her look such a pretty old lady. I declare, I am very proud of her.”

“I think she softens herself by loving,” Nelly answered simply.

And then they began to talk about going home. There were last walks and rides, going about to say good-by to every thing as Bessie phrased it.

“Mamma,” she said, as they sat on the porch one starlight night, when there was no moon, and the babies were all gathered inside, — “mamma, I’ve been so

happy all summer! I have so many pictures treasured up, I sometimes wish I had a genius, like you or Fan. But after all," with her brightly-flavored laugh, "that could only take in a few; and my memory is a better portfolio. I don't suppose I shall ever see any Alps or any Rhine, or streams of Wye or Severn, or even banks and braes of Doon; but I am quite content and glad and strong, to go back home, and take up the little things, and talk over all these great things. And, if I never have another grand holiday in all my life, I think I shall be satisfied."

Eugene Mallory sat on the step below, and listened, planning in his heart. And, when the dream became too sweet, he rose suddenly, and said, — the thing farthest from his present thought, —

"Are you not cold, Queenie? The nights are beginning to grow chilly. Let me get your shawl. There! and now I must go. It is a long ride over to the hotel; and mother will sit up waiting. — Good-night, Mrs. Endicott."

Bessie walked down to the gate with him, — a lithe, graceful girl, with sunshine in her face, her hair, her heart. Some time she would ripen into a gracious and lovely woman, with that better charm than mere physical beauty. She seemed to him like a rosy, cheerful dawn, or a bright, warm spring day. How would he dare bring her any nearer, — into his very life? It was so delicious, pausing here on the charmed threshold of manhood's sweet mystery.

But it came of itself, a few days after, — a word, a look, a tremulous tone, a sudden scarlet flush, and drooping of eyes, on her part, and a brave, sweet gladness on his, that spoke in every feature as he took her to his heart. Lovers! Yesterday they were friends, just touching the rims of each other's boundaries; and to-day it was so bewilderingly different. The joy almost dazed one.

She could have lived without it before she had it; but now to give it up would be a pang bitterer than death.

"My dear," said Mrs. Mallory, when they began to talk about it a little, "I want you to take me for a mother in deed and in truth. Eugene is all I have in this world; and I see no reason why a mother should be shut out of her son's life when she is old. He has had the best and richest of hers, much more than she can ever have of his. I know there is a strong prejudice against mothers-in-law; and young people are said to be better off by themselves, as if their greatest joy should narrow their life and sympathies at once. You can spare me a little out of these bright, young days; and I shall try to give it back in mother-love. I cannot be parted from him."

"No," Bessie said wonderingly, looking into the eager face, with its pink cheeks, and proud yet beseeching eyes, — "no: why should it be? Why shouldn't we both love him? As if anybody could have — too much."

"Thank you, my dear;" and there was a little huskiness in the ringing, musical voice. "You will be none the loser."

Mr. Endicott asked them, in his simply hospitable manner, to spend a few days at the rectory; and they came. Rose put the guest-chamber in order, just as she had for her own lover, long ago, it seemed, when he was a stranger. And Fan insisted that Nelly should come to West Side with her husband, and spend Sunday, to hear Louis Duncan preach.

So they were all together again, — children and children's children, except the one "who was not," the smiling, angelic baby, who had lived out his folded, rose-leaf life, and left behind a rare fragrance that would never die quite out of their hearts.

But the little mother looked so piteous with her grasping, sorrowing eyes, and her empty arms, that seemed

to go out into void space caressingly, as if she hoped to find him again; her absent, listening expression, as if she was waiting for him to speak from somewhere. There was a black ribbon around the neck of her white dress, and another in her leghorn hat. Stephen did not like her to wear mourning: so she put off all but these small signs.

An odd, unworldly life they had led in that homely rectory during the past two months. Business had taken Stephen away now and then. Louis had thrown himself heart and soul into the work, with the enthusiasm of a poetic nature which the lad had always possessed; though, in earlier years, it had only cropped out in irritations that rasped him to the core, heart-burnings, anger, and jealousy. But he had found his place and his work. An idealist he would always be, clothing, or longing to clothe, every thing with his exquisite perception of beauty and fitness, to find the hidden types and meanings, to go up on glorified mounts, to see behind the cloud and pillar of fire,—the kind of man of whom, in olden times, devotees were made, who saw Christ as if in a vision. A sense of spiritual exaltation shone in every feature.

He was delicate looking, though not unhealthy, and with a glow of mystic worship in his eyes, a reverence in every movement, a sweetness and persuasiveness that was almost womanly, yet not weak. His sermons indicated much thought, refinement, and culture; yet they had the pith of the old teaching, and never lost sight of the great truth in all the flow of poetic imagery.

Remembering the wayward boy, Mr. Endicott gave thanks anew; first-fruits of which he would never need to be ashamed, surely.

“Between Stephen and Louis, Rose seems a very child,” said Nelly to the doctor as they were walking home from church in the silvery glow of the September evening, with the air full of delicious, ripening odors. “Why, it seems to me as if Fan and I were ages older;

or is it because we are so much taller? Poor girl! she is the only one that has had a lasting sorrow thus far."

"I wish she had not taken it to Louis;" and there was a kind of dissatisfaction in her husband's tone.

"Why, it is perfectly natural. He is a clergyman, and they always were unusual friends. He thinks she saved him once; and she did. Barton, I won't have you even fancying" —

She stopped because she hardly knew what he did fancy, and there was a jealous warmth in her tone. The one who thought any harm of Rose must answer to her quick and sharp.

"My darling, I am not imagining any thing in the absolute sense of wrong. Stephen stands and looks at her in great awe, and then steps aside; and she turns to his brother, because he is, as you say, a clergyman. But no person or thing has any right to come between husband and wife — no sympathy, any more than love."

"I will not have you judging her hardly," and Nelly's voice trembled.

"She is lovely and sweet; and she is an Endicott: can I say any thing greater?" with an abrupt but tender pressure. "But I have had a wider experience than any of you; and marriage seems to me a kind of promised land. It is promised, and you set out for it; but with some there is forty years in the wilderness, and they only behold it afar off, never quite entering in. A day or a month doesn't comprise it all; a kiss and a little caressing is not all the manna: it is the giving and receiving on both sides; and what is given has no right to be handed over to another; neither has one any right to withhold. It is the empty place out of which the little child has gone; and some day she will come to see that only a husband's love can fill it. Yet it is so natural for a woman to crave the finest there is in sympathy."

"But Louis is so good; and if you could know all

there was between them in the past. I think two brothers never loved one another as those two Duncans do now."

Dr. Kinnard was silent for a few moments, and then changed the talk to some other subject. It was a subtle under-current that he saw with the practised eye of a thoughtful physician. Might it not right itself, especially if another child should come to draw them together? For happiness is not a settled and unchanging truth. What satisfied yesterday may be as but crumbs to-morrow.

The addition of the Mallorys to the household attracted and diverted attention. Mrs. Mallory was as charmingly at home as if she had been coming back to some earlier haunt. She possessed the fine grace of thorough breeding, that would never lead any one to wonder if things were good enough. You forgot what you proffered; or, rather, she so glorified it to you, that straightway it became of the best. She flitted in and out; she was exquisitely motherly to these young men, who paid her the purest respect. Even now, had she so willed, she could have drawn an enchanted circle around her equal to that of some of the famous old Frenchwomen.

Bessie was in a glow and radiance. The blood rippled vividly through her fair skin; tremulous lights and shadows fluttered in her eyes; and her voice had a musical fulness, as if it came from an overflowing soul. She was oddly shy, now, having lost her friend, and hardly daring to accept his attentions in the new light of a lover. But with his mother there was no timidity.

She was young, and they would not hurry matters.

"You see," explained Mrs. Mallory, "I am a believer in pleasant courtships. It is a season in our young lives that nothing ever blights. It has no cares like marriage, and, in its happy ignorance, sees nothing save endless islands of delight all along the sunshiny shore.

It is a great thing to believe in the perfection of bliss even for a year or two ;” and her rippling laugh seemed to frame in her sentences.

“ And now, ‘ gude wife,’ we must go home,” declared Dr. Kinnard. “ I feel as if I had been on a fresh honeymoon, and may do something ridiculous presently, since love-making is all the rage.”

“ It has been a wedding-journey,” returned Nelly with tender gravity. “ I seem to be having delightful holidays here and there, and only a little of the sober work.”

“ Ah, you think so !” And he remembered what would have been a grievous burthen to some women.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Blind and hardened they
Who hope for peace amid the storms of care;
Who covet power they know not how to use,
And sigh for pleasures they refuse to give."

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND.

THE Kinnards were at home again, though it was some time before they dropped into their olden groove; there was so much to see and hear, so many old friends dropping in to welcome them back!

The church had gone on beautifully. It was to be built of gray stone, and they had been very fortunate in securing some that had been cut under another contract; so that the walls, they hoped, would all be up before cold weather. It was to be Gothic, with a clerestory and a tower, a very decided ornament to the town.

Then Miss Grove and Maud returned home, both immensely consequential. Nelly had witnessed nothing like it the whole summer.

"Dr. Kinnard," Miss Grove said the next morning, at the breakfast-table, "I desire to see you privately at your earliest convenience."

"Very well, come in the office presently," was the undaunted answer.

Maud looked consciously elated. "What a haughty, disagreeable girl!" thought Nelly. "Will any one blame me for it, I wonder?"

The conference was quite lengthy. Maud meanwhile was entertaining her stepmother with a description of

Saratoga, quite as if she had taken pity on her benighted seclusion.

"Come, Maud," exclaimed her aunt, sweeping through the hall.

The doctor beckoned to his wife, who went in, when he closed the door carefully.

"Wonders will never cease," he began, then gave a hearty laugh, thrusting both hands into his pockets.

"Then it is nothing bad?" And Nelly looked amused.

"Some one has been found brave enough to bell the cat: that was our old idea, was it not?" and his eyes twinkled mirthfully.

"What do you mean?" was her surprised question, for she could not believe the thought that flashed into her mind.

"That the whole world has gone marriage mad. Aunt Adelaide has succumbed to the destiny of women-kind."

Nelly's face was one ripple of astonishment.

"She would never have entertained such an idea, but for my misbehavior. She would have been content to devote her life to me and the children, and made an honorable and happy home: I believe those were her very words. But since this place never can be a home to her again; since she has been continually thwarted in her endeavors to do her duty by the children, and estranged from them; since she has been made to feel that she was not welcome (and that vexed me, Nelly," interposed the doctor with a frown), — "there was no other course left. The long and the short of it is, that she has accepted one Mr. Garland, and has been in New York superintending her wedding outfit. Early in October she is to become Mrs. Garland."

"But who is he?" was Nelly's inquiry.

"A stock-broker. I do hope Adelaide's vanity and self-complacency have not blinded her into making a bad

bargain. She met him at Saratoga. He is about her age, a widower, with two children married (sons at that), and, she thinks, wealthy. I trust it may be so. She has a comfortable fortune of her own; and it would be a shame to have it frittered away. What with accruing interest, it must be at least twenty thousand. She has spent nothing since she came here, except for clothes and occasional journeys."

"I hope she will do well," said Nelly in a tone of great relief. To be quite free! Why, she could hardly realize it.

"Well I hope so too. It would be folly for either of us to deny that her going is any thing but an unalloyed pleasure. Still I was glad to have her come during her sister's illness; and I should not have liked to send her away while we could get along amicably together. Is this another intervention of Providence, Nelly?" And, drawing his fair young wife to him, he pressed lovers' kisses on her lips.

"Yes, I am thankful," was her fervent reply.

"There is one bone of contention looming up. She wants to take Maud altogether."

"O Barton! it does not seem quite right," cried Nelly in genuine anxiety. "It is such a fatal influence for a young girl. I do believe I would rather have her shallow and frivolous than so conceitedly proper, so arrogant, and coldly selfish. With all her education, she is narrow, and ignorant of the real aims of life."

"I know it; and it is my grief. Nelly, I wish I could have given her into your care two years ago: but it was not possible, and it would have been too great a charge for you. Then I think Maud is radically different from Bertie. I have a son, at least," he said proudly.

"Will you let her go?"

"I think not. Advise me, Nelly;" and, coming near her, he leaned both elbows on the table, resting his per-

plexed face in his hands. "We could not keep her at home, you see. She would be dissatisfied, and exaggerate every trifle to her aunt. I would not risk having you thus misrepresented. So she would have to be sent to boarding-school, where she would not be at all content, I suspect. I think Aunt Adelaide really loves her; and, if any evil befell her, she would never forgive me. Still, on the other hand, I cannot see her ruined without some effort to save her. I am her father."

"She had better go to school," returned Nelly decisively. "She is only a little girl yet, barely fourteen; and three years' association with companions of her own age may do a great deal for her. Aunt Adelaide would make her a woman before her time, without a woman's sense or judgment. I never saw any one who had such an uncompromising hostility to childhood pure and simple as Miss Grove."

"The first agreement was, that she should be a kind of governess to the children until they were old enough to go to school. But she insists upon keeping Maud; and I daresay we shall have some hard talks over it."

"She might spend part of her vacations with her aunt, and part here."

"It shall be, some way. I only needed your verdict about the school to decide me. None of you girls were ever away at school?"

"No." And Nelly thought of their happy home-life.

"Well, my dear, I must go out. I have idled away half the morning, and shall, no doubt, prescribe matrimony for some patient before I am through. So good-by, sweetheart."

Nelly went around in a maze. "Aunt Adelaide married! What could Mr. Garland be like? Would the wedding take place here?"

Miss Grove did not deign to inform any person beside "my brother-in-law," as she had always resolutely called

him. There was a week of much flurry, assorting of clothes and bedding, driving to the village; and then she went to New York, taking Maud with her, not troubling any one about permission.

Dr. Kinnard felt really vexed. Meanwhile, he consulted two or three friends on the subject of schools, and, with Nelly's advice, chose one in a pretty, healthy, and somewhat old-fashioned town. Melrose Hall was limited to seventy-five pupils, and had three departments, with a very lovely woman for matron, and an efficient corps of teachers. Two of Mrs. Newbury's grand-daughters were there.

Mr. Dudley had spoken of a church school, one evening at supper.

"No," said the doctor good-humoredly: "that never would do. Mrs. Kinnard would be accused of proselyting. We shall try to keep on the safe side."

He announced his decision to Maud on her return.

Maud colored a little. "It was hardly worth while," she said, with the severe air of her aunt. "We visited several schools in New York; and I am to be entered at Madame Dufresney's establishment. Nothing but French and Italian is allowed to be used at the table. Languages and music are to be my chief studies."

Dr. Kinnard looked at her in amazement.

"My child," he answered gravely, "I am your father, and the proper person to decide. When you are older, if you should wish to reside with your aunt, I will interpose no obstacle; but at present you are in my charge."

Maud's lip quivered; and her eye shot out an angry light.

"My little girl, you may feel disappointed for a while; but some time you will see the wisdom of this step. I think I have some right to your affection and interest; and I do desire to have your love."

All these years Aunt Adelaide had been nursing the

child's jealousy and distrust. Under the placid exterior raged fires ready to burst out at a word, temper that used to find a ready vent upon Bertie, but now was seldom crossed.

"If you desired it," she said with the passionate vehemence of a woman, "why did you forget my own dear dead mother? Why did you put another in her place? You care for no one but her; you" —

"Hush, Maud!" he interrupted sternly. "You have no right to arraign me, or the generous woman I have put in your mother's place, when you have received only kindness at both our hands. She has always been ready to love you. If I had wavered before, this exhibition of disrespect and anger would have decided me. After your aunt's marriage, you will go to Melrose Hall to stay until Christmas. No persuasion on any one's part will induce me to relent. I shall explain it to Aunt Adelaide immediately."

Miss Grove expressed much indignation, and stigmatized the whole proceeding as cruel.

"Adelaide," he said, "the child is surely mine. I think I hardly need remind you now of the little care either of these children received from their mother. Do you suppose, had she been well, and able to go into society, she would have attended Bertie through his long illness, as his stepmother did? Did she ever care for my comfort or pleasure? Truth is truth. It is ungracious to remember the faults of the dead; but you compel me to. And it is doubly ungenerous of you to set Maud up in rebellion."

"Of course, of course!" she retorted fiercely. "The child cannot see — a large girl like Maud! She is capable of forming no conclusion whatever." And her tall figure dilated with angry passion.

"The whole world would be welcome to see and judge. But recrimination is worse than folly. We have lived on

friendly terms so far ; and I am obliged for every kindly act of yours. Do not let us mar the remaining days. My mind is firmly made up in every thing."

He turned and left her without another word. Yet never had he felt so profound a pity for the woman lying in her grave, that her life should have left so scant a record of love and good deeds.

Maud and her aunt went into town, and did not appear at either dinner or supper. The next morning both were cold and haughty, Maud's demeanor an absolute and almost laughable caricature on her aunt's.

The invitations were sent out ; and then the family learned that the ceremony would take place at noon, in the church. Mr. Garland would be in town the day before ; and, but for the late unpleasant occurrences, she would be glad to invite him to call.

"Humbug !" ejaculated Dr. Kinnard. "Adelaide, any person with ten grains of common sense would admit that I had a right to choose a school for my own child. Ask your Mr. Garland here. I should like to meet him."

Trunks and boxes were packed, and marked for their new destination. Furniture was boxed, and the house in a whirl of disorder, that, had any one attempted in Aunt Adelaide's reign, would have brought about a dire storm. The hall was well-nigh converted into a storage place.

On Tuesday evening, Mr. Garland made his appearance, — a stout, florid man of middle size, with rather small, keen eyes, and suspiciously-brown hair and beard for his fifty years. He was important and self-asserting, and might domineer, if occasion offered, thought Nelly. His manners had a society-polish ; he was handsomely dressed, and wore a profusion of chain, seals, and rings, with a prominent diamond shirt-stud.

"I suppose it is well enough, if Aunt Adelaide likes him," was Nelly's comment.

"But he quite extinguishes plain people like me," said

the doctor, with the old humorous twinkle shining in his eye. "I must confess I would like to know something about his standing and general character; but, if Adelaide is satisfied, I surely ought to be content to have her married."

And married she was in the richest of brown silk, point lace, and diamonds. A fine-looking bride, after all. The Kinnards went to church, and wished her joy as she started for Washington on her tour.

Maud had been exceedingly sullen and disagreeable, so far as her family behavior went; but neither father nor mother had made any comment. She came home from church, locked herself in her room, and would have no supper.

"Maud," her father announced on the following morning, "I want you to get your trunk packed to-day. Tomorrow I shall take you to Melrose Hall."

A furtive, angry gleam sparkled in the eyes she did not venture to raise.

There was no softening to her. She did condescend to kiss her grandmother. When Bertie went to school, she had nodded a cold good-by; and she barely touched her stepmother's hand.

"How much that child is like Aunt Adelaide!" said Grandmother Kinnard. "I declare she fairly gives one a chill."

"That child" solaced herself with many lofty reflections. She had some elegant clothes, and she meant to astonish the other girls. She was the happy possessor of diamonds. She was an heiress. She was an injured and desolate girl, and had a cruel young stepmother, whom her father adored. Altogether, she was rather anxious to see what impression this would make upon "the girls."

Ten days afterward, Aunt Adelaide's boxes and furniture went away. Mr. Garland owned a house; and they

were to go to housekeeping at once. Nelly straightened out her own domain, and drew a long glad breath. She was full and undisputed mistress.

Dr. Kinnard was rather grave for a while, thinking about his daughter. Had he done his very best? Ah, the mistake had commenced farther back. She inherited Aunt Adelaide's self-complacency, and her mother's passionate, jealous temperament; and both had been fostered by her injudicious training. What else could he do now? Would she ever see the bright, joyous, wholesome life she was shutting out?

But he slipped into an easy, delicious existence, and gave himself up to it as completely as he had on his bridal tour. A happy man he counted himself; for there seemed nothing for Nelly to do but enjoy it with him. Rachel remained, and had become a competent housekeeper; and grandmother was fond of doing little bits and snatches of work. Daisy and Bess came over frequently, — Daisy rarely for more than a day; but Bessie was still quite in love with her dear old doctor.

He yielded himself completely to the subtle, developing power that was shaping his inner life, — the half-hidden, half-revealed tenderness of a pure womanly nature. It is one thing to lay down laws and principles of existence from a narrow, one-sided view; quite another to be in the midst of, nay, to be the object of, a generous regard, that neither exacts nor withholds, but is like a free and bountiful sunshine in the spring, calling to life and light the hundred tender blossoms in the grass. He had known so little of what it was exalting and delightful to know; and now it came as a development of all the higher faculties, ripening like a late summer. The manifold joys of that sweet trust, when there was absolutely nothing to come between, the searching into each other's faces for meanings that did not need to be thrust out of sight, or saved for rare moments of confidence, but dared to shine

bravely, with a minuteness that was a glimpse of the soul-heaven opened;—the kingdom within, that must go on radiating, that could not be contained in a little space any more than the fulness of God's love.

Dr. Kinnard had said to Maud, on parting with her, "I shall expect to hear from you as often as once in a fortnight: so she wrote. Little, formal notes they were,—she was well; the studies were not severe, for she was far in advance of her class; the girls, for the most part, were ill bred and ignorant; the French teacher had an execrable accent; the rooms were poorly furnished: and there was a general air of discontent pervading these epistles. But she reserved her chief complaints for her aunt.

Mrs. Garland's marriage, it must be confessed, was not altogether the success she had expected. True, Mr. Garland had a position, and did business; but there was more outside show than actual solidity. His house was heavily mortgaged, and part of it rented until the ensuing spring; and it was an intense mortification to set up housekeeping in apartments. She found that Mr. Garland had counted largely on her fortune. There was this and that investment, sure to double it, large dividends of such a stock, heavy interest for some wonderful bonds; while seven per cent was mere bagatelle.

But she was not deficient in courage and practical ability; and she saw that she must make a resolute stand for herself. Mr. Garland was not Dr. Kinnard. True, *he* never would have been so foolish as to marry a fortuneless young girl. Her sharp temper helped her, too, to gain an ascendancy in marital affairs, and, perhaps, was none the worse for her husband, though it did gall and fret him.

"If you are agreed," she announced rather coldly one day, "I will take up the two mortgages on the house. I desire to keep the whole of it in the spring. But I do

this with the express stipulation that you shall not endeavor to sell the property. For the remainder of my money, I think it safer in government bonds."

After some discussion, he was forced to assent, as the first mortgage was soon to fall due.

It was not convenient to have Maud at her Christmas holidays; neither did the young lady desire to return home: so she was left to follow her own devices.

Nelly felt quite free, therefore, to keep the feast with her own kin.

"By all means," said grandmother in a cordially consenting tone. "Bertie and I will have a nice time together."

Bertie looked wistfully at mamma.

"You will be sure to come home the next day?" he begged beseechingly.

"Oh! quite sure."

Mrs. Mallory and Eugene were the only other guests. Mr. Mallory was to go South immediately afterward to settle some business, and dispose of an estate for his mother. She insisted upon Bessie sharing her solitude; and the child was nothing loth. Indeed, she yielded quite enchantingly to the sweet old lady's fascinations.

But it was not to be all prosperity and joy. They had found many precious ways in their journeyings, hitherto, like a sweet story told on a summer afternoon beside a rippling brook, with widespread trees overhead, and through them shining the wonderful blue, God's care and keeping. Yet there had been no marvellous good fortune, — the middle way, the path between, seeing both sides, yet not absolutely touching either. Bessie might go to grandeur; it seemed fairly promised; but, with the others, it had been the more moderate kind, in which the gifts are glorified with the kindly using.

The winter proved a hard one in business circles. The Endicotts took a little here and there out of their store

of comforts for the poor and needy. The Churchills were ready-handed as usual. Dr. Kinnard sent in smaller bills to the mill people and those working on short time. Nelly widened her charities a little.

It was to Rose that the misfortune came. There were heavy business-losses, failures of firms in different parts of the country, that at last touched Stephen Duncan. Not from any fault or negligence of his own, rather from the dishonesty and carelessness of others.

Nelly went over to the rectory to hear more particularly.

"It is very disastrous, I believe," said Mrs. Endicott; "but poor Rose bears it bravely. It seems as nothing, compared to the loss of her child. Winthrop went down to see if he could assist Stephen in any way; but he (Stephen) decided that it was better to give up every thing, and begin anew. He is so strictly honest and honorable. There were two other partners, you know; but every dollar of his property was liable for the debts of the whole. He bought out his brother's part of the house some time ago, you may remember. It was his intention to settle it upon Rose; but he had not done so as yet, which seems a great pity. One of the partners, Mr. Lewes, gave his wife a very valuable house last summer, it appears, and, besides that, he has nothing. I have a fancy he was not as scrupulous as the other two, by what Winthrop said."

"But to give up her beautiful home!" cried Nelly.

"O mamma! do you remember how we all went to welcome her there when she returned from her bridal tour? I can't think of Rose in any other place: she wouldn't take root. He has been so kind and generous to his brothers, why can they not?" —

"Stuart is soon to be married to a Southern heiress. He had some money in the hands of the firm, which he drew out last fall; and Stephen looks upon it as a great

relief now. Louis does lose a little by an unfortunate investment they made some time ago. Winthrop said he was very kind indeed."

"And yet his boyhood seemed so much less promising than Stuart's," said Nelly musingly.

Mrs. Endicott smiled in her beautiful motherly way.

"There was something else planted in his heart, Nelly," she made answer in a reverent tone, "— something above brilliancy, or worldly wisdom, or the pure planning for self. And now he has it in his power to pay them both back a little. I think he will. I can trust God to bring forth his fruit in the right season."

"If we could do any thing for her — poor Rose!"

"My dear, there may be some wisdom in it that we do not see now. I think Rose has grieved a good deal, in a soft, passive manner. She did not ask her baby back, or question God in any daring or fretful way; but she has remained sore at heart. It was as if she kept taking him out of his grave, caressing him a while in a kind of stolen fashion, then putting him back, — a sort of coveting sorrow, after all. And this may rouse her."

"Oh if Mrs. Whitcomb were only there!"

"I think it is best just as it is. Rose was such a clinging little body, so distrustful of herself, so ready to yield, almost fearful in some phases. And this will bring out all her strength, because it touches her love for Stephen. Next week I shall go down and stay a while with her, and see what is to be done."

Nelly sits in the old low rocker, and thinks of the joyous time, three years ago, when she was there, choosing her bride-clothes; and they were all so very, very happy. Rose's path had gone over green and sunny meadows for a long distance: hers had seemed to start by the briery wayside, and, later on, come out to blossoms. Was there some wiser hand portioning it day by day, like the bread and the manna? She had trusted for herself: could she not, then, trust for Rose?

There was a very sweet and cordial sympathy given on every side. A fortnight with mamma seemed to infuse new blessedness into the present and the future. True, Stephen had lost all, in a worldly point of view; but he had youth and health and energy, and had, also, acquired some business experience, that would stand him in good stead. Friends had begun to rally around him; and later, when the spring fairly opened, a new business offer was made him by a house that had stood all the storms bravely, and had watched and appreciated his manliness and integrity.

There had been another bit of rippling sunshine through it all. Bessie, who declared she was a princess living in an enchanted castle, and pretty, bright Mrs. Mallory, — they would have Rose and Stephen come to little suppers, and drive in the park, and share with them the brightness of a wider living. Mrs. Mallory took a warm interest in Louis' chapels and charity projects, and claimed both men for an evening's escort now and then, since there was no Eugene at hand.

"My dear," she said, after she had been studying Bessie a long while one day, "to have rounded out the romance, I think Louis should have married your sister Daisy, though there is time enough yet. But I am glad his heart was not unalterably fixed upon you; for Eugene confessed to me that he fell in love with you at first sight; and it would have broken my heart to see him crossed in his wishes."

Bessie throws herself on a footstool, and leans on Mrs. Mallory's lap, kissing the dimpled hands in girlish fervor.

"I wonder," she says slowly, "if you could not have loved some other girl."

"But, you see, he did not love any other girl. No, Bessie, I felt just as he did: I wanted you."

CHAPTER XX.

**“ Love that asketh love again
Finds the barter nought but pain :
Love that giveth in full store
Aye receives as much and more.”**

It was early June. All was bloom and beauty again. The breath of the woods, the meadows, the gardens, the winding rivers and still ponds ; the flutter of birds traversing the dreamy air that reflected all of heaven's own blue, coming nearer and nearer with brooding love ; the whirl of bees about their daily business ; the hums ; the rippling among the leaves ; the rustlings in the grass ; joined in giving a sense of wide, sweet abundant life everywhere.

Something more than that beautiful out-of-doors. Dr. Kinnard stopped and took great whiffs of it, as if he had never half enjoyed it before, never half given thanks before. He glanced around on the loveliness : he listened to a distant warble in a chestnut-thicket. He wanted to utter some sort of psalm, just as he had heard the words go up with glorious organ-tones ; but he could only think of the one strain, “ My soul doth magnify the Lord.” It was in heart and brain ; but his lips trembled when he tried to shape them to any words ; and so he just walked up and down the wide porch where the first roses were in bloom, his head bared to the morning sunshine, and bent in a strange awe, — a reverence such as he had never experienced in all his eight and thirty years.

There was a strange, glorified stillness all through the house. Voices were lowered to a kind of hushed yet

welcoming sweetness ; and steps were light, with the sort of hopeful confidence when one fears a little, and desires to believe much.

Up stairs, in the room where he had brought her first as a bride, — the room whose scant and chilly furnishing had appalled her, and which they two had adorned in an eager, almost childish fashion, she lay now. Sunny flecks and sparkles stole in every crevice of the closed blinds, flickering about the ceiling, hovering over the bed, as if to crown her anew with her joy of motherhood.

His child ! His little daughter ! There had been other children to Dr. Kinnard, but none that had brought the grace of this. The others had seemed pure natural gifts : this one he had longed for, prayed for, desired with all the strength and passion of a man's strong soul. And he had them both. Ah, no wonder the day was glorious, and full of sunny lights and shadows, full of fragrance and rare loveliness. It never could have been any other time than June.

Presently he went into the office. Here in a slender vase were three roses she had gathered yesterday. Two had blown out full : one was still in bud. He took them out softly, wiped the wet stems with careful fingers, and rolled them in a bit of tissue-paper. They would always have a strange sacredness to him.

“I know why I'm glad it is a girl,” said Bertie that evening, with a confident nod of the head.

“Why?” asked Dr. Kinnard, with a sense of amusement.

“Because you see, papa,” with great earnestness, “you can love it ever so much ; and it won't be a bit in my way. But, if it was a boy, you might not love me as well ; would you?”

“And you care so much for my love, do you, Bertie, my son?”

There was a peculiar softness in the father's brow

eyes. Mary Grove's child had never been dearer to him than at that moment.

"O papa!" drawing closer, and putting his small arms over the broad shoulders, and giving one long, deep inspiration.

"Bertie, there can nothing destroy my love for you, and only some great sin on your part take away the pride I hope always to have in you."

"And she will be my mother just the same?"

Ah, could he answer for her, now that she had her own? Yes: he would.

"Just the same, Bertie, with God's help and grace."

There was a little silence; then he said softly, "Could I go up and kiss her, do you think?"

"Yes: let us both go."

Later, when she was beginning to sit up in pretty white frilled wrappers, Dr. Kinnard repeated the incident to his wife.

"It will not do to be too glad. Suppose there should be seven?" And an amused light shone in her eyes.

There was a droll little gesture, a happy smile.

"I fancy Bertie and I will be able to welcome them all."

But she thought of the child's words as she sat in the blessed summer silence, with her baby lying across her lap, — that mysterious bundle of soft flannel, fine lawn, and dainty embroidery; those doubled-up, and then out-stretched tiny hands, the little picture-face, with dimpled chin, and mouth like a rosebud, whose wandering eyes opened and shut with that sense of infinite peace, and supreme indifference to the great world, as if it, indeed, was the greatest thing in the world. Would she never be jealous with a mother's engrossing, absorbing love? Would she never seek for the best places, the whole of papa's knee, his interest, his affection? It had fallen out so with other very good women.

Ah, to narrow her kingdom, and shut others out! As if love could be made better and finer by compressing it into one or two human hearts, instead of following the pattern He set, who so loved the world, the whole world, who bid the children first of all in to the feast.

She uttered a little prayer, that God would keep *her*. Then she took in all the pleasantness of the day, of the joy.

"We will stay at home this summer," she said to her husband. "We will have a glad, delightful time with mother and the girls."

Everybody came in to see Dr. Kinnard's baby. In the first year it would have been no great marvel: now it had the grace and rarity of a blessing withheld a while.

It was a fine, pleasant-natured little thing, though not dowered with the brilliant beauty of Rose's lost treasure. It was healthy, bright, and content. No nights spent in a crowded ball-room, no fashionably false dressing, no ruinous indulgence in heats and passionate tempers, or restless whims, had borne the due fruit of nervous fretfulness. It slept, it ate, and grew, and was lazily happy.

"I never did see such a good baby!" grandmother would say hourly. "It has Barton's eyes, and, somehow, the rest of it looks like your sister Daisy. I never fancied Barton was very fond of babies before; but no one could help loving this child."

The doctor brought Daisy over one morning, partly because Mrs. Nurse had been compelled to leave rather soon, and partly because he wanted her. Bessie was now so engrossed with her lover and her bright, piquant mother-in-law elect. The marriage had been set down for the middle of August; and the bridal tour was to be Europe, — all of it.

One day Mrs. Glyndon came flying in. She did not seem to change, or grow older, or tire of her constant variety and journeyings. Now she was going to Colo-

rado with her husband, and would see all the wonders of the West before she returned.

Nelly smiled with generous delight.

"O Mrs. Kinnard!" with a sudden accession of vigor in her tone. "You remember Van Alstyne, our hero of Severn Point? I met them when I was in New York—everybody says 'them,' now," laughing, and raising her eyebrows.

"Yes. We saw Mrs. Sherrard at the White Mountains."

"I am dreadfully disappointed in that handsome fellow. Mr. Glyndon insists that my heroes always come to grief. He had some fine capabilities. He was so cultivated and gentlemanly, that I do not see how he could choose such a woman."

"Perhaps she chose him," said Nelly mirthfully.

"So report says. There is a tint of scandal about her. She was divorced, and this large fortune was left her by some old man, while she was in Europe; but quite a doubt is thrown upon the relationship of uncle. He was so fastidious too; and she is undeniably loud. She drives a pair of fast bays in the Park, takes up any of her gentleman friends, and acts quite as if she were a widow still. It is said there was a little difficulty at first, but she insisted upon her 'train;' and she is just the sort of woman to carry matters with a high hand. And he flirts notoriously. Why in the world did they marry? I think such husbands and wives are a positive injury to society."

Nelly thought of his theories of soul growth and development, of companionship, and all the dangerous restlessness.

"I am very sorry for one thing. You remember Elsie Graham? I thought her such a nice girl; and so she was. But I believe some entanglement began at Severn Point: at least, she must have fallen in love with him,

and they have been foolish enough to keep it up. She has refused two good offers of marriage since, and her mother is much distressed about her. They go out together, and she makes no secret of her preference; rather prides herself on her constancy. Where will it end? I do pity Mrs. Graham. Why can't Elsie have the sense to look at it with the world's eyes? Here she is, wasting all her sweet young life in a feverish dream, — a reprehensible passion for a married man, as there isn't the least danger of Mrs. Van Alstyne ever dying."

"It is extremely sad," returned Nelly, glancing furtively at her sister.

"And positively wicked. These things lower the tone of society so much when both parties are tolerably well off, and in good standing. No one seems quite brave enough to say, 'You shall not bring your pernicious doctrines or shameful friendships in here.' If the Grahams were poor, Elsie would lose caste at once. What a difference a little money makes!"

Daisy Endicott sat there, thinking, after the two women went out on the porch. There had been a time when she was almost ready to vow eternal constancy to a dream, a memory; when she felt that she would be profaned by any new kiss or caress. Suppose she had been his wife even, and he had insisted upon keeping up the friendship with Miss Graham, making new friendships with other women. Nay, while he seemed to be so drawn to her, perhaps he was giving the same glances, smiles, and meaning pressure of the hand, to others.

She raised her head with an almost haughty grace, and looked the pure, open, honest day in the face. She even laughed lightly, proudly. Nothing of the old fancy remained: she did not long now to give it sepulture. The sweet, strong, true duties of life had crowded it out. She had come to a correct estimate of the man, — brilliant, fascinating, witty, and tender, with that holiow,

selfish tenderness of sensuous enjoyment and absorption. There was no respect or esteem for foundation-stones; and her regard had perished slowly, inasmuch as her faith had at first refused to receive the shock, but very, very surely. His name did not even call up a wandering thrill. She had been deceived, because, in her utter innocence of the world and its wiles, she could not believe any man would be so basely, so cowardly, treacherous; and, having come to understand, there was no more temptation for her. If he were to appear before her now, in entire freedom, though her senses might be pleased with his handsome face, and musical, finely modulated voice, her soul would shrink with something akin to disgust, that he could so put on the semblance of nobleness.

"How bright and happy you look, my darling!" Nelly said, kissing her as she re-entered the room, in a little trepidation, it must be confessed.

Daisy smiled cheerily. "Why should I not be happy?" she asked.

"True," in a rather grave, wondering fashion.

There was a sudden impulse in Daisy's soul to tell her bit of experience; but, after all, why should she even give it that stamp of consequence? It was like last year's wayside flower, that she had plucked, and carried in her hand until it withered. It would be false and morbid sentiment to place it in prominence beside the roses of to-day.

Dr. Kinnard went to Melrose Hall, and brought Maud home. He had visited her twice in the meanwhile. She was nearing fifteen now, quite tall, and not as thin as formerly, but with much of the olden precision, that would always militate against grace. She had not made herself quite the object of envy at school that she had desired. There were richer girls, and young ladies of higher social position, that she could not hope to extin-

guish: even her vaunted scholarship had hard work to hold its own. She had rendered herself conspicuous by over-dressing at first, and been very properly rebuked for it; and her arrogance had drawn out a flow of schoolgirl satire. The path had not been one of roses.

She was doomed to another disappointment. Aunt Adelaide had planned, long before, to have her spend the vacation with her. Mr. Garland had not proved the most tractable of husbands, however. The adverse winter had shorn him of much of his fictitious wealth. To save herself, Mrs. Garland had been compelled to purchase the house. It was larger than they could afford to maintain: so she lowered her pride sufficiently to take a gentleman and his wife to board. This was a success in another way, as it served to keep Mr. Garland at the highest point of good manners continually. She had spoken of Maud's coming.

"I think it is hardly worth while for you to burthen yourself with her," said Mr. Garland pompously, "unless her father is willing to pay her board. If I were in good circumstances, I would be happy to entertain *all* your relations; but, as matters stand at present" —

"I have only *one* relative whom I shall be likely to ask," she returned with haughty dignity. "I can afford to make the allowance of her board myself."

"Oh! very well, very well," with a great clearing of his throat, and an impatient rubbing of his hands.

He had been deeply disappointed in having no chance to handle his wife's money, and in finding that he could not impress her with his importance as easily as the first Mrs. Garland, who had actually trembled at his frown. Still it gave considerable weight to talk about "my wife's money."

On her part; there was a feeling of smothered but almost vengeful anger. She had been over-reached by her own carelessness. She had asked no counsel, made

but few inquiries, and thought mostly of the triumph over her brother-in-law. If it had all been as she expected; if she could have patronized and thrown into the shade; if she could have given Maud an *entrée* into grandeur and society: but there was nothing of importance in this rather commonplace life. She was a much greater lady at Edgerly, with her pony phaeton. The money in the house served to decrease her income, which was now barely enough for her personal expenses. She was Mrs. Garland, of course; and she observed, with a kind of bitter contempt, that the world paid homage to the magical "Mrs.," even if the husband was a *nonentity*. She had no love to reconcile her to her keen disappointment, no little touches of romance, that, after all, serve to gild prosaic life wonderfully.

There could be no tour for herself and Maud this summer. Her boarders had gone to the seaside, and the house was undeniably dull; but she asked Maud for a few weeks.

Nelly gave the young girl a cordial welcome. Maud just touched her lips to her stepmother's. She had never given her one hearty kiss: such effusiveness, in her opinion, was not only underbred, but silly. She glanced at the new baby, and supposed it was a great care; did not see what there was in babies to rouse any one's enthusiasm, and had never cared for them.

Her room was in perfect order. Nelly had ventured upon a trifle of re-arrangement to take off the stiffness. The parlor was opened invitingly.

"We must be very good and patient with her, Barton," Nelly said with a pleading look in her eyes. "She will miss Aunt Adelaide so much!"

"Do you know, Nell, I feel as if I should like to shake her until all the nonsense and primness came out of her, and the insufferable air that borders on insolence? She shall pay you outward respect, at least;" and the doctor's face flushed, while his tone was most decisive.

"O my darling! don't do or say any thing cross, for my sake;" and her arms were around his neck.

"Nelly, you twist me around your finger, just as Jane, wise woman, said you did;" yet he looked as if the process was not altogether uncomfortable.

"We have so much happiness and joy!" in a tremulous tone, and with dewy eyes.

"And we do not deprive her of any; but, somehow— My darling, you taught me to love Bertie, teach me to love Maud."

"I will do my best, God helping me."

So the doctor asked Maud to drive with him, and tried, in various ways, to interest her. She was cold and supercilious, but quite rigid on what she considered her own rights.

"I must have some new clothes," she announced a few days after her return.

Dr. Kinnard looked helplessly at his wife.

"I wonder if you would not rather shop in New York with your aunt?" inquired Nelly graciously.

Maud stared. "I suppose it would be as well. There is no one here to attend to any thing."

A quick, offended light blazed in Dr. Kinnard's eyes.

"I should be very glad to do any thing for you, Maud, where you like to trust me," said Nelly in the kindest of tones, glancing up imploringly.

"I will not trouble you."

It seemed as if the father must resent the impertinence. Nelly quickly interposed.

"Maud," she replied,— and her voice trembled with the effort, though it was clearly sweet, — "you must remember that I stand in a mother's place to you, and that no duty is a trouble, but a pleasure instead. Neither am I so ignorant of the needs and desires of young girls: I have had my own younger sisters for companions. You will miss Aunt Adelaide greatly; but I want you to be

lieve, even if you cannot give me a daughter's affection that I do at least desire a friend's place in your esteem. I shall try to be every thing to you that you will allow."

Maud sat in silence; and the storm was stayed. Never had Dr. Kinnard honored his wife more than at that moment of beautiful womanly dignity, softened by the noblest part of charity, — love in a brave action, denying the baser portion of self its importance.

Dr. Kinnard gave his daughter a hundred dollars, and saw her safely seated in the car, having telegraphed to her aunt to meet her at her journey's end.

"I daresay she will think me stingy. I have been considering this matter, my dear wife; and I want your counsel. I am not a rich man, and, doubtless, never shall be. What do you think of my setting aside a certain portion for Maud, and not allowing her to overstep the boundary? It would be no more than simple justice to the others." And he glanced up with a perplexed air.

"Why, yes. I think that would be right."

"Her tuition is three hundred a year. Allowing a hundred for travelling and incidental expenses, and two hundred for clothes, would make six hundred. It is all I can afford to spend upon her. There is Bertie to be educated as well."

"That seems to be a just division," returned Nelly frankly. "And we girls hardly had a hundred a year to spend on our clothes until we were married. We didn't look beggarly, either," and she gave a rarely humorous smile. "I think Aunt Adelaide has been very injudicious in Maud's attire. There is no need of a little girl in her position going dressed in silks and the finest of lace. But I suppose we cannot make any great reform at present. I trust somewhat to her good sense as she grows older."

"If that will not satisfy Aunt Adelaide, the rest must come out of Maud's own money: of that I am resolved."

It came to an issue sooner than they expected. Mrs. Garland had the good sense to see, that, at present, it would not be wisdom to take charge of Maud, granting that her father might be induced to consent. She could go to school for three years; and, after that, Aunt Garland could "bring her out." By that time, the interest of her money would be a considerable sum,—enough to support her, independent of her father.

"But a paltry hundred dollars!" she said when Maud stated her affairs. "You want a nice summer silk and a winter silk. We will do our best with them, and then write to your father. I daresay that remarkable baby is swaddled in the finest of linen and lace."

Aunt Adelaide had discovered a wonderful dressmaker, — a poor young girl with charming taste and deft ability, and who worked for a dollar a day and her board. The two dresses were skilfully fashioned, one or two altered; and then the doctor was applied to for more means.

He explained his plan, and enclosed a check for fifty dollars. There would be but fifty more to last her until next July. He particularly desired that Aunt Adelaide would purchase her some useful school-dresses.

"It is just as I expected, my dear Maud," said her aunt angrily. "You lost your best friend when you lost your mother. And, if your father had treated me as I should have been treated, I do not think I should ever have left you. I always told him that I was quite ready to devote my whole life to 'my poor dead sister's' children. But he had to be foolish enough to marry that ignorant young thing, who rules him completely, and who grudges you every dollar. I don't know how you will be able to endure it."

Maud cried a little, and believed herself a very ill-used young woman with a cruel stepmother.

But, after two or three weeks, she decided secretly, that it was not extravagantly delightful here. There were no

exhilarating drives in the Park, no stylish callers with gossip of opera and theatre. The shopping was soon done; and she did not know any girls with whom she could have a good time. She began to feel very lonesome, and wonder whether being "Dr. Kinnard's daughter" was not more enlivening. Still her pride would not admit of her going home before the last moment.

Mrs. Garland made her husband take them to Long Branch for a day or two. Maud looked at the elegant dressing and showy equipages with an envious eye. Mr. Garland was no longer the devoted lover of a rich woman, but a commonplace, selfish husband, with a straitened purse. Maud's quick eye drew rather unfavorable contrasts between him and her father. Altogether the visit was not as productive of evil as it might have been under more favorable circumstances. Aunt Adelaide was growing fretful.

At home, it must be admitted, they felt relieved. Bertie was developing into a well-behaved, chivalrous boy, and absolutely improving in good looks. Grandmother was a little childish and captious at times; but no one ran against the sharp points when they bristled outwardly. Moreover, she was coming to have a great respect for the Endicott girls. To think that Miss Bessie, without a penny, was about to marry into a rich and stylish family, and that *her* mother-in-law elect thought the ground was hardly good enough for "Queenie" to walk on; that she should be taken to London and Paris and Rome, where it was hardly likely Dr. Kinnard's wife would ever go; that she should receive this wonderful good-fortune in such a simply pretty way, without being at all "puffed up with pride," — was quite a marvel. When she came over, she always would dress up grandmother in carnation-pinks and heliotrope.

"I am too old," Mrs. Kinnard would say. "Put them in your own shining hair."

"One is never too old to be made pretty," she would rejoin in her rapid, rippling way, that reminded you of nothing so much as a swallow's flight in the sunshine.

They had been greatly at loss in choosing a name for the wonderful baby. Every thing, almost, had been "tried on." At last, they settled to the appellations of the two grandmothers, — Frances Annie. It was to be christened in the new church; and dear old papa was coming over for the Sunday.

"Nelly," said her husband, "I have asked Mr. Dudley to stand for baby. I think he was very much pleased. I don't know a man that I honor and esteem higher than Arthur Dudley, except your father;" and he smiled.

"Oh, how strange! I don't know" — in a wondering, hesitating way. "But it can't make any difference. I asked Daisy this morning. We have grown so near together this summer, and she adores baby. Besides, she is a good, conscientious girl."

"I wish it *could* make a difference;" and there was a breathless impatience in the doctor's tone. "If it only would! Why can't they see how they are fitted for one another? She is the only 'clergyman's wife' that your mother has raised; and I cannot bear to see her miss her vocation."

CHAPTER XXI.

"She is not dead, and she is not wed,
And she loves me now, and she loved me then:
At the very first word her sweet lips said,
My heart grew youthful again." — OWEN MEREDITH.

ARTHUR DUDLEY, after the first keenness of his disappointment, had thrown himself, heart and soul, into his church-work. The new building had come opportunely. It contented him in staying. It brought him into active, friendly interests with the Kinnards again. He understood now, by Daisy's continued avoidance of him, that her refusal was in earnest; not from coquetry, or any girlish ignorance, or even momentary offence.

He saw so little of her through the winter! During the summer, he exchanged with Mr. Duncan; and, though warmly pressed to stay at the rectory, he had declined courteously, with the better grace because he had promised to spend the time with a friend. He and Miss Endicott had been pleasantly polite; but the old cordiality was wanting.

Then they had gone through another winter, meeting on rare occasions. Daisy staid so little at Edgerly now! It was not until the birth of the baby, that she appeared to resume her olden place. Then she rode out with the doctor, and drove Nelly in the pony-carriage.

One day Dr. Kinnard had brought her to inspect the church. The general depression of business had been rather in their favor. One and another, while out of employment, had given the labor of their hands; and, on

St. James's Day, the church was to be consecrated, though the tower was not yet completed, and many little things remained. The windows had been put in (nearly all of them gifts); and the wood-work was being rapidly finished.

The main part was designed for a permanent structure; but, at the chancel end, a temporary room had been erected to serve for the Sunday school and business-meetings at present, and until the church should need enlarging.

Daisy and the doctor were rambling about, and commenting. There was much to praise, and very little to blame. It was simple, neat, yet not at all common.

"The ladies are to have the carpet all ready," said the doctor. "The chancel furniture is to be a gift from Mrs. Warner's mother; and the — O Dudley!"

Daisy turned with a quick rift of color, and a smile, so like the Daisy of old times, that he held out his hand with a sudden, cordial movement; and in that clasp they seemed to renew their friendship.

"Did she like the windows? What did she think of the color of the wall? They were to have some illuminated emblems in the chancel. The organ was to stand here, and the choir just within reach. He liked so to hear the voices? Would she be likely to stay — or to come over to the consecration?"

He asked that hesitatingly, and stooped to pick something from the floor.

"We are going to keep her for a while," said Dr. Kinnard. "Mrs. Kinnard and the baby cannot do without her."

"Have you decided upon the christening?"

"Yes. We had delayed on account of the difficulty of finding a name;" and the doctor laughed.

A few days after, Daisy had gone to do an errand, expecting to meet the doctor, and come back with him; but,

after waiting as long as she thought prudent, she started to walk home. Going through a bit of rather dusky woods, to make the way shorter, she had come upon Mr. Dudley again.

"If you have no especial objection, I will see you home," he said in a tone quite free from hesitation, kind, quiet, but no more.

"Is it hardly worth while? I am so near now!" And she made a wavering pause.

"It is worth while if it does not displease you."

"No: I only thought" —

They were both silent for some seconds. Then he began to ask about the household. Maud had come home.

"I am very glad Miss Grove married, and went away. I think the doctor feels more free, more certainly the master of his own house. And that little girl has been made too old for a child."

Thus talking, they reached the wide-open, hospitable gate, with its great urns of flowers on either hand. He turned with her. A wild, strange beat fluttered up from her heart.

"Will you come in? I think supper must be ready."

She made a great effort to say this, when not to have done it would have been ungracious.

"Thank you, not to-night," in a warm, cheerful tone. Then, reaching out, he took her hand.

It trembled in a kind of frightened manner, but was not cold.

He knew she stood there a few seconds; for he heard her footfall on the step. She was not distant nor offended.

He walked slowly homeward, studying upon the encounter. He had never put himself in her way: he had too much high-bred delicacy for that. But, since the episode at Severn Point, she had had no actual lover: that he knew well. What if, after all these months — But no. He would not dream of it.

"My wife's sister is to stand," Dr. Kinnard said, when he had made arrangements for the service. "We have kept her for that."

He had not the courage to call her "Daisy" to Mr. Dudley's face.

"We want you to come to tea. No one else will be in."

"Very well. I shall be happy to."

Nelly had mentioned the matter with unwonted trepidation, ending rather meekly with, "If you do not mind."

"Mind! Why should I?"

Daisy Endicott meant to put a little careless surprise in her tone; but it was not quite that.

Mr. and Mrs. Endicott came over for the Sunday. A quiet, solemn service it was; and they two stood strangely side by side, never once glancing at each other, but trying to think only of the little child, yet unconsciously taking a wider range, both, perhaps, understanding what they might have been to each other.

She was very self-possessed at supper, neither coloring nor trembling when any incident brought them nearer. In truth, she wondered at herself.

"It is because he has forgotten so completely," she thought. "He *has* forgotten, and it is better: one could not remember so long without any hope."

On the Thursday following was the consecration. One of the church-wardens was to have a dinner prepared for the clergy. Mrs. Newbury had arranged to give them a supper, as there was to be a service at four. And if Miss Endicott would only come over, and help her about the entertaining!

"You are used to clergymen's wants and ways," she said. "I shall feel so much better and safer, if you are there."

So Daisy went, and made herself not only useful, but agreeable. The girlish timorousness had been succeeded

by a sweet and genial graciousness, that forgets all about itself in rendering others at ease, and then learns that this is happiness.

Arthur Dudley watched her. Not handsome and stately, like Mrs. Kinnard; not with that dazzling wild-bird flutter and lightness of Queen Bess; but a womanly serenity, a sort of everyday refinement and ease, as if it was no best garment for company, — just the one to adorn a clergyman's house, the friend and companion for all time.

The brethren sat until quite in the evening. Two or three were to take trains: two were to be Mr. Dudley's guests, and were sent home in the carriage. And, presently, they had all said good-night, save one.

"Are you going, Miss Endicott? I want to walk over to Dr. Kinnard's."

"Oh, yes!" she cried eagerly; and then went for her hat.

It was a soft, summer night, with a young moon rising tremulously over the tree-tops. Somewhere in the edge of the woods a whippoorwill sang, mingled with the note of a late homeward-going thrush — or was she crooning over her birdlings? Arthur Dudley drew her hand through his arm in that manly fashion of appropriation that somehow takes possession of a woman for the time. Once she stumbled over some half-bare tree-root growing across the path, and he caught her quickly. Both exclaimed "Oh!" with a little laugh, and, recovering, walked on. It broke the spell of silence; and they went to saying amusing trifles to one another.

Dr. Kinnard had just come in. He would drive Mr. Dudley home, and they would have their talk going along.

"Good-night!" she said, in a sort of joyous, ringing tone, as if she was at peace with everybody.

"I do believe she is still to be won," Arthur Dudley thought to himself. "Her heart has never been touched."

He made some excuse to come over the next day. No, she had not changed, but was frank and genial, like her olden self. He would be wary, now, and win her by slow degrees.

But after a little she had to return home. Bess's wedding was at hand, — gay, enchanting Queen Bess, who was hardly more than a child.

They all liked Eugene Mallory so much. Yet there was an awe in the thought of Bessie going away for years. The others had not fluttered so far, but that, now and then, they could look into the old home-nest.

And then it sounded so curious to hear Mrs. Mallory settle what she was to have by saying, "You can purchase such a thing in Paris for a mere trifle: I would not bother about it. I would not waste my time making dresses: you can get them as you want them, fresh, without any of the crumpling of packing. I would not have this or that," until she narrowed the *trousseau* to the smallest dimensions. Was it her delicate way of not taking much for Bessie now, when she was to have such an abundance afterwards?

So she went to church in simple white, one morning, and came back Mrs. Mallory. There was a church full to be sure; but they did not see any blaze of diamonds, or shimmer of pearls. There were some real orange-flowers in her hair, and a cluster on her bosom; but she looked sweet and stately, as if she had come back to her child's name, and was a pure white lily.

They had cake and wine and kisses. Mrs. Mallory was so dazzling in her old-lady brightness, that no one could be sad; and she talked about the steamer, and the voyage, and the time of reaching Liverpool, with as much nonchalance as if she had said a palace-car and Niagara. They were to spend a day or two in New York. The Duncans went back with them in the afternoon.

"I cannot believe it, mother," Mr. Endicott said as he

sat in his quiet study after supper. "Only the other day, she was a wild little thing. Don't you remember how she used to swing round, holding on my arm, and scamper off like a kitten? Let me see, how did it all begin? Stephen Duncan came here first, and asked me to take his brothers; and then — and then — Mother, are we growing old? It is so strange to have all these married daughters and their husbands! It's a queer sort of addition, that, after all, leaves you but very little, I think:" and he paused to wipe his eyes with his white silk handkerchief. Mrs. Mallory had brought him a dozen, the best that could be found.

Mrs. Endicott came around, and kissed him.

"How fortunate that Edith was born!" with a rift of simple gladness. "For, you see, there will be many years before she is grown."

The next thing for Nelly Kinnard was her step-daughter's return, a week or so before school began. Maud would not have confessed it to a living soul; but she was really thankful to get away from Aunt Garland's dull house. Her hitherto narrow life and experience had widened somewhat; while Aunt Adelaide, fretted and soured, drew closer within her shell, and was correspondingly bitter, though she tried to assume a demeanor of lofty indifference. There were still many things in life that she could have made the best of, if it had been her nature to make the best of incongruous materials, to pick out bits of comfort and brightness among every-day incidents; but it was not, and never would be. And, all this time, she held a grudge against Dr. Kinnard, as if he, somehow, had forced her into her present dissatisfaction.

Maud came from that austere, unloving house to her father's, so radiant with an atmosphere of kindness. Bertie was quite a little gentleman. Grandmother might have a few childish ways, to be sure; but they softened her, and were really no detriment. Dr. Kinnard evinced a

decided disposition to be jolly. He was full of odd little jests and half caresses: he no longer shut himself in his "den," and locked the door. The parlor was always open and inviting; neighbors were dropping in with bits of outflowing social life; and Mrs. Kinnard was in the midst, the sun around which they converged.

When Aunt Adelaide trained Maud in carping, critical ways, she little dreamed that the weapon might be turned against herself. So true it is, that we often get back just the measure we have meted out. She was too sharp and keen, too prematurely a woman, not to remark the contrast. There was an air of distinction and breeding about Mrs. Kinnard; and a sense of culture and refinement pervaded the house. The talk was not of the stock-market, or recent political developments, rings, and swindlers. For the first time, the forlorn, narrow, empty heart was stirred with a quivering sense of something it had never known, or been taught to look upon in a distorted light. No one tyrannized over her: no one nipped the breath of pleasure by snapping frost, or snatched it away with grasping selfishness. She could not even make a martyr of herself: there were neither cross nor fagots, chains nor cells. No one read her wearisome lectures on the meanness and wrong-doing of her neighbors; but she was taken to ride, asked into the parlor, and introduced to guests, and found Mr. Dudley absolutely entertaining. Ah, Aunt Adelaide! it was in your power to overlay the fine gold with the dust and rubbish of falsehood and injustice; but you could not take it utterly away: some day it would shine out all the brighter.

She packed her trunk again; and her father accompanied her to school. Her heart swelled with a new sense of loneliness. They were all at home, bright and happy; and she —

"Well, I am glad that is off my mind," confessed Dr. Kinnard on his return.

Nelly glanced up with a light in her eyes, partly amusement, partly delicate reproach.

“There, I know just what you want to say, Nelly;” and the odd puckers settled in his face along with a perceptible flush. “You are so much of an angel, that you can love long beforehand, in season, and out of season, and trust for the fruit to grow in midwinter depths, I do believe; but I have a good deal of the old, unregenerate Adam in me. I have absolutely longed to give Maud a good scolding, to strip off her furbelows, put on a plain calico gown, and set her in some little girl’s place until she knew how to behave herself properly. I cannot understand your patience and sweetness with her. Is it really best?”

“I think it is. At all events, I want you to let me try it freely, without grudging. There are some fruits and flowers, of which the slow, natural growth is so much better than the forced, hot-house production. She has been so long trained awry, that, if we wrench off all the branches suddenly, there will only be a bare, unsightly stump left. At her age, she must learn to know and judge for herself. I think I have seen some indications of a change since her return from her aunt’s.”

“O Nelly!” and the doctor gave a mellow, sweet-natured laugh: “you do hang a hope on the smallest peg of any one I ever saw. This one isn’t bigger than a thorn on a rosebush, and of the same quality.”

“But you must admit that it is near the rose?” and she looked up with a merry archness in her brilliant face.

“Well, I thought her terrible sometimes, rude and ungracious.”

“I think she was occasionally moved by so strange and new a feeling, that the ungraciousness cropped out as a sort of bristling armor, with the instinctive desire of self-defence. She has been trained to expect constant warfare from us; and she is on the lookout for it: so you see

It is not easy to throw down her arms at the first pleasant word, and believe all at once. And when she finds that we do not expect her to, that we are willing for her to try us, but that the love is always there, waiting for her, I do believe she will take it some day."

"Oh, you wise little woman! You do set silken snares for the feet of the wary: the unwary walk into your net without any snares at all. Where is my little moppet, Frank? I must console myself with some innocent-minded kisses, that have in them no flavor of new gowns or cunning intentions."

The next bit of brightness was the tidings of a baby at the Duncans',—a little boy come in the stead of the other given up to the Lord, to be set in his garden.

At the rectory they were oddly changed and quiet; yet they did not narrow their lives. On the contrary, it seemed as if a breadth and richness came to Mr. Endicott, instead of any decline in power. He had used his life so wisely, so sweetly! He was asked to preach a sermon here and there, and had several pamphlets printed, that attracted considerable attention, not only for their sound doctrine, but the ways and methods of practical usefulness set forth.

Then came a call to a city church, with quite an accession of salary.

"Why, I don't need to consider," he said with his sweet, unworldly smile, when his wife spoke of it. "My people are not tired of me: why should I go? No spot could ever be so dear to us as this old rectory, though it is something like a last year's bird's-nest. Religion isn't simply bringing people into the kingdom: it is keeping them there, teaching them the precious meanings, the use of the promises, the value of the prayers. I can do that, and we shall have enough to live upon: so what more do we need, except that 'the everlasting arms' shall be about us?"

What more, truly! It would be like spoiling the silken silver hair with strange, obtrusive dyes, or painting the soft, pink, wrinkled cheeks with brilliant carmine. They had come to the autumn; and they liked the shelter of the friendly trees that had grown about them: no smart new iron fences or brick walls could cast so pleasant and fragrant a shade.

Daisy Endicott was glad, too, for many reasons, that she could not put into words. Life had come to have higher and fuller meanings for her. She had reached her twentieth birthday, with a little awe and great gladness. She was beginning to see what there was in the world, to take it, and live in the midst of the delight, not to be asking whether there would be bread for to-morrow, or sunshine, or any scantiness on account of the bountiful to-day.

There had been no great and heroic struggle for peace. Little by little, she had grown out of the secret restlessness: the way had become lighter and clearer; and she saw that this desire and pain and sorrow had not been love, in any true sense, and that she had overcome it all. It did not even pain her to hear that Van Alstyne was married. All the others had bewailed his choice a little. She understood in the depths of her soul how much better it was that his wife should not have that tender, clinging, loving nature, but be able to satisfy herself with outside pleasures. Of them all, she pitied poor Elsie Graham, who was casting away her soul for a vain shadow.

Daisy had taken her friend back with a clear, honest rejoicing, rather than any thrill of delight. He was so purely friendly. She had given him a great pang and sorrow; and to know that he had outgrown it was a present joy to her.

They went through a very pleasant autumn. There seemed so little to do at the rectory! Gertie and Edith were in school; there was a good, experienced woman in

the kitchen; and Mrs. Endicott had lost none of her olden art of management. Daisy fluctuated between West Side and Edgerly. But then Fan was always happy and prosperous; the children were well; Aunt and Unele Churchill were good company; and there was such a wide and friendly life spreading out before her. Nelly seemed rather more alone; and then they two were nearer in age. Daisy embroidered for the baby, did this or that trifle for Nelly, and went every week, to spend, at least, one day with her. She was beginning to look upon her future life as settled,—this vibrating from one to the other, and taking a kindly interest in her sisters' children.

Dr. Kinnard looked on with a shrewd gleam of foresight, yet at times a little puzzled. They were too frank for lovers. There were no shy, pretty embarrassments on Daisy's part, none of that half-transparent planning on Mr. Dudley's. Yet he seemed always to drop in on the days devoted to Daisy; and he, not infrequently, drove her to the station at night. On rare occasions he went over to the rectory, but not with any lover-like persistency.

"If they do not see, they will be the blindest people in the world. He likes Daisy so much!" was the doctor's vexed comment.

Meanwhile the holidays were approaching. What would Maud choose to do?

She made her election. Miss North, her room-mate, had asked her for the ten days, and she wished to go. Not a word about Aunt Adelaide.

"I do not know that I quite approve of her going away with strange girls," said the doctor decisively. "She had better come home. You do not think so, I can see by your face."

"Is it so much of a barometer?" asked Nelly, smiling. "Well, this is what I *do* think exactly. You

have not been to Melrose Hall this season: so suppose you take a journey thither, and see this Miss North in an incidental way. If you can approve of her, I should let Maud go. Her great need is companions of her own age."

"But she ought to take some kind of interest in her own home," was the rather dissatisfied reply.

"Perhaps she will in time."

"Well, I will tell her that she owes the pleasure to you."

"You will do no such thing," returned Nelly quickly. "That would spoil it for her at once. No, I am quite willing to remain in the background."

"But she ought to be made to feel that she owes you some kind of respect;" and the doctor paused to study his wife's amused face.

"My dear Barton, there are many things that you cannot force into people's souls. We may sow virtues all along the wayside; but if we have the childish habit of digging them up every little while, to see how they are progressing, they cannot take firm root."

"I freely admit there is a good deal of contrariness to human nature."

"It is not altogether that. Children dislike to have the leading-strings constantly dangled about their necks. If you can place some good in their way, and let them think they are the actual discoverers, they take to it twice as kindly. Isn't it sometimes a good deal of vanity on our part to insist that they shall always recognize our share in it? I do believe in a wise freedom."

"With a managing hand underneath. Ah, you wise woman! I shall begin to suspect you of practising your delicate art on me presently."

"Yet you admit that my system is an improvement on Aunt Adelaide's?"

He laughed pleasantly, and kissed her in token of assent.

The call at Melrose Hall was a decided success.

"I do think, my dear," he said afterward, "that Maud actually begins to improve. I was surprised when I saw her friend,—one of those cordial, good-hearted, jolly girls, in plain attire, whose sensibleness strikes you at once. And Maud wants to ask her home next summer. It seems there is a great family of these North children—and Miss Kitty, about sixteen, is the eldest. And, since Maud never had any childhood, the sooner she can get back to its shadow, the better. Aunt Adelaide is not very well; and I think now, Maud's visit of last summer was not a brilliant success. I do hope it has not turned out a poor marriage; for Aunt Adelaide was worthy of a better fate. Still she has no one but herself to blame. She scouted the idea of my making any inquiries concerning Mr. Garland's real standing. I must also tell you that Maud inquired very kindly after you and the baby."

Nelly's eyes beamed.

"I think it will all come around right, if we have patience. While I should never try to draw Maud away from her aunt, I still think a diversity of interest better. And, if she should come to have a strong one at home, I shall feel amply repaid."

There was a pleasant Christmas, with the usual festivities. Mr. Dudley managed to get over to the children's festival, at Mr. Endicott's. Daisy had been her father's vicegerent; and as Mr. Dudley watched her pretty, helpful ways, the old idea came over him, with the longing that he had quite put away, he fancied,—to have her for his wife, the beneficent spirit of his own home.

She had never given any sign or token that it might be. He could not risk another misunderstanding: the friendliness was so much better than nothing. But if she could have loved him; if she could love him now! If

he could draw her to him in that frank, sweet manner, and have her say the one word!

Yet they were unconsciously coming nearer. If some incident would only open their eyes! Dr. Kinnard fretted over it, and could hardly keep from making some overt demonstration, but was held back by Nelly's finer delicacy and patience, that always came like an inspiration.

And yet the first hint Daisy had of it came in jesting gossip. Other people began to wonder.

She paused suddenly in her serene and happy living. Did he care? Did she want him to care?

There was a confused and painful sensation. She was glad to get away alone, where she could look the terror in the face, where no eyes could see her burning cheeks. If he went quite out of her existence again—

The question was to come sooner than she thought. He received a call to a flourishing Western city,—a church to be built up out of much the same material as here at Edgerly, save that it would be larger, more widely known, afford him a greater sphere of usefulness, perhaps. They urged him very strongly. Some other man could do his work here, and he might be of more service there.

Dr. Kinnard vetoed the plan at once. "If it is for a larger salary, Dudley," he said in his straightforward way, "half a dozen of the present subscriptions shall be increased."

"No, it is not that. Do not suspect me of such mercenary motives, my dear friend."

"Then, Dudley," for the doctor could keep silence no longer, "my advice to you is, to go on with the rectory, and marry a nice pleasant girl, who will just fit into the niche of a clergyman's wife, and proceed with your work here. I think you can do both."

Arthur Dudley colored vividly.

He went over to consult Mr. Endicott. Daisy sat in a corner of the study, crocheting a little tippet for some of her parish poor.

"No, don't go," Mr. Dudley said with a gesture of the hand. "You may be able to help us to a decision."

She resumed her seat and her work, and listened. What came over her? A kind of dismay at first, then a quick sense of loss and loneliness. Was he more than a friend to her?

Dinner was announced before they were through. Daisy rose with averted face, and tried to compose her tumultuous feelings. Mr. Dudley had been reading his friend's letter descriptive of the place and the work. Mr. Endicott had said, "It may be your duty to go."

She understood presently how it was with her. The hazy pleasantness cleared up sharp and distinct. With Mr. Van Alstyne it had been a dazzling glimpse of possible love, fervent, delicious, but comprehending nothing beyond, — a supremely selfish delight. And this was so different. Yes, she would like to enter into this man's life, the loving, sympathizing, keeping his home pretty and neat and cheerful, as mamma had done in her sphere, reading and talking to him, taking part in that wider work, the whole world. Every thing would be made more sacred and beautiful by sharing it with him. A sense of soul-life revealed and brought close, an awakening to a great richness, a consciousness that thrilled, but wavered not, that here might be her abiding-place.

Might be! Ah, what if it was too late?

If he had taken her at her word; for in this friendly demeanor of the last year she could not recall one lover-like look or act, one tone warmer than the clear good Christian fellowship. They had ridden and walked together: there had been opportunities —

Like a swift rushing tide it came over her. Whether he went or staid, no matter what his duty or condition, she would be shut out: she had shut herself out.

She seemed to draw long breaths in an unilluminated polar solitude. She was hurt and chilled; and yet it had been her own sad mistake. Would God give her the grace to live out of this, and ever be calmly happy again?

She helped about clearing away the dinner-dishes. She could not go back to the study again: it would seem strange to sit in her own room alone. If she had an errand to Fan's, or to Mrs. Fairlie's. But no: she could not talk on pleasant indifferent subjects. Then some one came for papa, an urgent summons.

"Don't go yet, Dudley. I want you to look over that new commentary. — Come in, Daisy, and keep him company while I am gone. Let me see — where did I lay my gloves?"

Daisy knew, and brought them. He stooped to kiss her cheek, then gave her an almost startled look.

"Why, childie, are you not paler than usual?"

She was brilliant then; and they both laughed a little, he blaming his old eyes. Then she took her seat in the corner, and went on with her work. Mr. Dudley turned the leaves of the book. The fire in the grate sent out a ruddy glow; and some pale yellow bars of sunshine lay on the floor. Neither of them could begin a conversation: so the ticking of the clock alone broke the silence.

Arthur Dudley was thinking it over. He knew now that he should never care to marry any woman save Daisy Endicott. Love and marriage were sacraments to him, not to be profaned by the mere sense of usefulness. A housekeeper or cook could be hired: a tolerably cheerful home could be made with books, pictures, easy-chairs, and glowing fires. If he could not have her, he would have the other; but no woman should mar it for him, under the mistaken idea that she was lending it a glory. If he could not have her — well, then it would be best to go away.

He rose, and crossed over to her corner. As well

decide the matter now as to let it hang for days in tormenting alternations.

"Miss Endicott," he began (for although, in their household relations, these girls had been used to various diminutives, for the world they hedged themselves about with that air of fine breeding which did not allow undue familiarity), — "Miss Endicott, you have expressed no opinion yet. Ought I to go, or stay?"

She did not raise her eyes, and even her breath seemed to become entangled with that flutter in her throat. Over her face and neck stole a wavering pink; and her fingers trembled visibly. Perhaps the most cruel impulse of his whole life was to prolong the moment, and read those delicious signs of agitation that could hardly be wrongly translated.

He placed his hand over the fingers, gathering them up, cold and trembling as they were.

"If I stay, Daisy, I must ask again for the boon I was once denied. If you *can*, love me with your whole heart: but do not answer out of pity, or any sentiment less strong than my love for you."

She did not stir, nor offer to raise her drooping head, not even withdraw her hand from that close, warm pressure. Oh! had he failed again? He stooped a little, brought his face nearer hers: she felt his breath on her cheek.

"Oh!" she cried, with sudden, eager tremulousness. "I ought not answer you until I have told you something. Then, if you still care" —

She had loved another, then.

"Yes, let me tell you." She raised her blushing face now, with the tears shining in her proud, honest eyes.

"Yes, tell me," he repeated, sitting down beside her.

Had she been less morally brave, she could not have confessed her story in such a straightforward manner. It was very simple, after all, — her girlish mistake, her secrecy, the one kiss upon her hand.

“And I have come to see now how wild such a thing would have been for me. Only a few months of bliss, and a whole long lifetime of neglect or indifference. I don't know whether it is jealousy or not; but I should want the whole heart of the man I marry, and I would strive, oh, so earnestly! to cherish and return the fullest regard.”

“It is not very much,” with a satisfied smile, “yet, Daisy, I *am* thankful that it has been so little. Somehow I think I should not want the love of a woman who had been trying every one within her reach, as some women do. And now will you answer my question?”

“If I will be your wife? Gladly,” with a bright, quivering blush. “And I will try to make you so happy! I have been studying mamma;” and there she paused, confused by her own *naive* confession.

“No, the other question.”

She looked up puzzled, then, taking in the whole expression of his face, bent hers lower, until it almost hid itself on his breast.

“If I love you,” she answered in a soft, trembling whisper. “I think I have loved you a long while; though I never realized quite what it was until to-day.”

He raised the sweet face, and kissed it many times, with a kind of exulting consciousness that he had put in a pre-emption claim with the first kiss of so long ago.

Papa Endicott sighed a little; and yet he welcomed his new son-in-law cordially.

“I think she will make a good clergyman's wife,” he said.

So they settled that the rectory should go on. There would be work enough in Edgerly; and being near Nelly added to the pleasure of it.

Arthur Dudley returned home a very happy man. At the station, he saw the Gale's box-wagon and the man.

“Are you going right out home?” he asked.

"Yes," answered the man. "Can I give you a lift?"

"As far as Dr. Kinnard's, if you please."

"All right. Jump in."

For he could not rest, until he had told Barton Kinnard that the closest human tie possible between them was henceforth to make them brothers.

CHAPTER XXII.

“That all of good the past hath had
Remains to make our own time glad,
Our common daily life divine,
And every land a Palestine.

Through the harsh noises of our day
A low, sweet prelude finds its way:
Through clouds of doubt, and creeds of fear,
The light is breaking calm and clear.” — J. G. WHITTIER.

“WE often think the story ends with a marriage. It seemed to me, that, when Fan and I were married, the whole world was swept up clean and clear, and had nothing to do but fold its hands in its silk-aproned lap, and rest. I was so childishly happy. It seemed as if there never could be a great event in the world again, hardly a lover beside Fan’s and mine.

“I suppose I narrowed the great events, because I thought they were done happening to me. But, before the baby came, I had found out my mistake. I daresay many of us have a brief season when we think we are the very centre, and the worlds not lighted by us are hardly lighted at all.

“Then Nelly married Dr. Kinnard. I did not dread so much him or the children, as his mother, and the first Mrs. Kinnard’s sister. I think, now, it must have been very hard; they had ruled the house so long, and he was so accustomed to their rule. Then, too, he was peculiar in many things.

“She had worked some wonders before our first visit to

her home, which, though old-fashioned, was really very lovely. Dr. Kinnard treated her in an indulgent, fatherly manner, as if she were a pet or plaything. I wondered if she would ever get into the very middle and heart of his life, as I was in Stephen's. If she ever felt free to talk and laugh over trifles, or confess any little perplexity, or even badness; for wrong thoughts and tempers will intrude occasionally. I could see there would be trouble about the children. It seemed to me no one in Dr. Kinnard's household really loved children, not even himself. They were to be endured, to be made to behave properly, and kept out of the way as much as possible. The little boy had gone to school, sorely against his aunt's will; and Nelly tried to humanize him a little. But his grandmother fretted; his aunt sneered and cavilled at nearly every thing he did; and his father was often annoyed by his blundering.

“‘No one really wants her to love the children,’ said Stephen to me. ‘It is bad for her too. Unless Nelly is a very exceptional woman, her heart will be centred in her own; and they, poor things, will be worse than orphaned. I can't help feeling sorry for them, though they are not lovable in themselves.’

“‘Nelly must change very much,’ I answered decisively, ‘before she can make an unjust or even indifferent stepmother. She will do her very best.’

“‘Circumstances are so much against her.’

“I used to think of her often. Her letters were bright and cheery: she had taken up some pleasant church-relations. I liked the clergyman, Mr. Dudley, so much. He was so clear and staunch in his faith. Dr. Kinnard used to argue with him in a kind of half-whimsical, half-in-earnest way, and bring up bits of science that seemed overwhelming; but they never confused, or appeared to trouble him. When the conversation was brisk and animating, I used to think of the old dialogues Louis was

so fond of reading. Here was the modern Christian and the ancient philosopher.

“I had a great deal of interest in my own home. True, Stephen did not bring his business to me; but there were many subjects besides, and I always had Louis. He was superintendent of a mission Sunday school. He asked two or three of the boys to call around in the evening; and, after a while, we came to have quite a reading-club in the nice warm kitchen. He supplied them with books and papers; and I always used to bring out a plate of sandwiches, and another of cake, — old-fashioned cookies and queencake, real Dutch crullers and doughnuts. It was such a pleasure to see them eat! One night Louis asked two of the boys to wash their hands, and took them to the sink. After that, their hands and faces fairly shone. Then, as occasion offered, he and Stephen used to get situations for them.

“Then Mrs. Whitcomb had an opportunity to go abroad with a very lovely woman, who possessed an abundance of means, but who was an incurable invalid. She was so well fitted for the post; and then, too, it would be such a delightful thing to see all Europe, or even a part of it. Mrs. Raymond had already spent five years there.

“‘You would like to go?’ Stephen said to me. I know my eyes were shining with anticipation for her.

“‘Oh, how delightful it would be!’

“‘Why couldn’t we go, Stephen?’ said Louis. ‘Not just now: I would rather wait until I am in orders. You will want a rest from business some time; and, when the baby is older’ —

“‘Yes,’ answered Stephen, rather absently I thought.

“I wondered if he did not care to go. He had been over the British Isles, to Germany, and Paris. Perhaps — but I should never tease him. I could be very happy without Europe, when I had so much.

“Mrs. Whitcomb’s leaving gave me a little more care.

I was really housekeeper then, planning meals, looking after bed-linen and napery, counting the silver, and seeing that my best china was not kept around for everyday uses. Then there were visits, too, from all the folks. I did use to enjoy Fan when she came to shop. We used to talk about all Wachusett; and now we took in Edgerly. Ah, how happy we all were! Only now and then I used to say, 'Poor Nelly!' thinking of aunts and grandmothers, and stepchildren who almost broke their backs, and had to be nursed for months and months. No own mother could have been more devoted than Nelly was. Daisy used to tell over bits of her care and kindness. 'And it is odd,' she would say, 'but I do believe Nelly is teaching Dr. Kinnard to love his own children.'

"Fancy any one teaching Stephen to love our little boy! But, then, he was so rarely beautiful and cunning!

"I like to linger over these days. It is a bit of fairy-life; and yet there was not much real grandeur in it, — a plain, three-story brick house, just around from a fashionable avenue, pretty, but not extravagantly furnished. It seemed quite a palace to me when I was first married; but Stephen had friends living in so much greater style, that I soon began to feel very modest.

"I used to think, if we could only keep a horse and carriage, I would not ask to live any more elegantly, but for Stephen to have a little more leisure, and the carriage at our command. Not that I suffered much in this respect. Louis used to take baby and me out pleasant afternoons. The income of his part amply sufficed for a few indulgences of this kind; and then he never cared to go alone. It was having a kind and tender brother to anticipate every want.

"We did not see so much of Stuart. He was in a large mercantile house, and doing considerable travelling, as he expected, in a year or two more, to have a share in the business. He was considered very promising and bril-

liant; and young ladies were beginning to be fascinated with him.

“Right in the midst of this came the blow and the sorrow. Last week, brightness and laughter; tiny feet pattering up and down; silvery tones floating through the atmosphere with such a glad, sunshiny, tremulous vibration; tender kisses at morn; a little prayer at night,—a blessedness so perfect, that I used sometimes to ask why I was singled out for the exceeding great joy.

“And then an awesome, fearful silence; a little coffin; flowers whose scent will be indissolubly connected with my first-born, if I should live centuries; and then a darkened house; a sorrow so wordless that I could only sit in its fearful grasp, holding close and fast to something,—not God, not heaven where he had gone, not any comfort or consolation, but a strange phantom, a baby that was never out of my heart or arms, who lay there still and motionless, who could not answer my kisses or my passionate longings.

“I was quiet a good deal, for Stephen's sake; but, besides, such an awful terror had fallen upon me, that I did not want to speak. Daisy came to stay with me. I was so glad for Stephen's sake! She used to talk to him; and she had such sweet, comforting ways! I who had measured the ache and agony of his soul could not bear to touch upon it.

“What days they were! The common duties of life were gone through with. I did not neglect my house, nor my church, nor my poor neighbors, in whom I had taken an interest heretofore. I used to wish there were more for me to do, that every moment could be full, leaving no room for listless sorrow. I fancied I fought against it, in just enduring passively, in not rebelling.

“The first thing that roused and interested me was Louis's coming ordination. I had meant, all along, to make a surplice for him, I was so fond of fine needle-

work and embroidery. He drew patterns for the latter: he had such a genius for designs and emblems and windows, and finding the hidden meanings, the types that were a soul-substance to our thoughts, that brought us somehow nearer to God,— the fine-twined linen, the cunning work, the beaten gold, the service for him. And so I took it in hand while he sat and talked of examinations, of hope, of a diviner life, all the poetry and ideality of his nature coming out. I used to wonder, sometimes, if this was really the Louis Duncan of years ago. But it was not, altogether. The love of God had constrained him to better thoughts and purposes. I used to feel now, that, if he were not to be a clergyman, he would be an artist.

“The time came; and he took his solemn vows, was set apart to sacred uses. Papa and mamma were present; and their cup of joy filled to the brim. “Son Louis,” father said with tender solemnity; and he seemed, somehow, adopted into our family, — made one of us.

“It came to me then — it was a foolish thought, I know; but there was Daisy. If Louis could but like her! She would make such a lovely clergyman’s wife!

“Then Fan planned a grand summering at the White Mountains, not hotel life, with its set routine, but the grand freedom of house-keeping on a farm. Mr. Ogden knew of a house they could hire. The Kinnards were to join; and if we would come!

“‘I wish you would, Rose!’ said Stephen with much solicitude in his tones. ‘You need a change. And I think I shall have to go to Chicago presently for two weeks or so. Louis might stay all the time.’

“Louis looked at me questioningly.

“‘No,’ I answered: ‘I don’t want to go. They will all be gay and happy, and I want quiet.’

“That night he asked me if I would go to Europe. He might get off by August, he thought; and we could have six months.

“ ‘No,’ I returned, not even tempted by that. Afterward I was so glad I had not caught at the relief.

“ ‘There was another plan presently. Papa was going with the party. His parish would pay expenses, and find a substitute while he was gone. Would not Louis like to come, and Stephen and I? Daisy was to stay to keep house.

“ ‘Oh, it would be delightful!’ exclaimed Louis. ‘A whole summer spent there! Rose, we might live over what was good in the old times.’

“ ‘Stephen studied me then with some anxiety.

“ ‘Yes,’ I returned: ‘I do believe I would like that. Only, *can* you come, Stephen?’

“ ‘I will try my best. Yes, I shall be there a good deal.’

“ ‘So it came to pass that we went home for the summer. Not until after the rest had all gone: I did not feel as if I could bear the bustle of getting off, and the good-bys.

“ ‘We came in and took possession. I in the guest-chamber, because it was large and airy; and I knew, too, that Louis would rather have some other one. There were only Daisy and Gertrude left. So we took up a quiet house-keeping. The Churchill carriage was placed at our convenience.

“ ‘After a fortnight Stephen started for Chicago. Business was in a perplexing state; and, instead of two weeks, he was detained six; and then he had to go farther West. Altogether, it was two months before he reached home; and then he could only make a flying visit with us. Of course, I could not go back with him, and leave the girls.

“ ‘Was I happy that summer? Looking back, I can hardly answer, either way. It was a kind of languid content. Louis was so good and watchful. He would never allow me to tire myself out going around with Daisy; he drove me out often; he read to me, talked to me, sat through the twilight evenings with me, and, some

how, I came to be strangely comforted. I gave up my project for him and Daisy. She was too practical: she was a curious mixture of frankness and indifference; sunny, but not enkindling. He needed a different nature; and I doubted much whether she would be strongly attracted towards him.

“So we drifted on very pleasantly. They all returned home at length, with Queenie's brave lover. We had considered Fan a most fortunate girl; but this would distance her completely. The Mallorys were old friends of the Duncan family: Stephen and I had met them incidentally. Mrs. Mallory was such a charming old lady! I always thought she was like the solitaire diamonds she wore, — bright, sparkling, the very finest of their kind, but not too much in any way. She never tired you. When she was going out of the room, you wished she could stay ten minutes longer: when she ceased talking, you wanted to ask her two or three more questions. She appeared fond of mamma; but she perfectly adored papa and Bessie.

“I moved about them quietly. They had all distanced me. I was not jealous. Nelly was so happy, so handsome too. Fan always had her cup running over. No sorrow for any of them. I was glad with a pure, unalloyed gladness; but I hugged my own sorrow to my heart.

“‘You are still fretting, Rose,’ Stephen said, his brows drawn a little, as if — somehow — it displeased him.

“‘No, I am not fretting,’ I made answer almost coldly. ‘I have been quite — quite happy.’ I had meant to say content; but I altered it to please him.

“‘You don't look bright: you are thin and pale.’

“‘As if I *could* ever be bright again!’

“I was sorry the moment I had uttered it. Stephen turned and walked away. What had come to him of late?

“Louis found me afterward, crying, and comforted me.

“I did not realize any of these things then. I was selfishly wrapped in my own grief. So long as I was not

obtrusive, I thought I had a right to it. And the almost womanly sympathy of Louis confirmed, instead of rousing, me. Stephen appeared a good deal pre-occupied.

“Then we made ready, and went back to the city. Business seemed urgent and perplexing. Some evenings, Stephen did not get home until late; and then he was tired. We had so few of those sweet little matrimonial privacies, that, though foolish, are very endearing between husband and wife, and, after all, are never meant for the world. I did not bother him about any thing, because I wanted him to rest while he was in the house; and then I always had Louis. He had taken an assistantship in a church not far distant. I used to go to morning and evening prayers; and yet it was not like the religion of my girlhood.

“But I had not come to troubles then.

“Was I growing any better or happier? Life seemed so dreary, I wanted to be away and at rest. I only thought of heaven, in those days, as a place of brooding bliss, where one might wander dreamily by the river-side, and pluck healing fruits to strengthen and refresh their souls as nothing on this earth could help them to do. I was calm and placid: it was not my nature to be fretful.

“One night after we had gone to our room, Stephen sat down on the edge of the bed. He had been home all the evening, and very quiet. Louis had been explaining to me a guild association, that was to be in working-order another summer to look after sick children and weary mothers, and take them out of the city now and then. My heart had melted over the thought of the poor, wan, poverty-stricken babies. I was planning what I would do to help as I brushed out my hair. I never wore any curls now: they seemed sacred to baby-fingers, — laid away as his little clothes were.

“‘Rose,’ Stephen said, ‘will you come here a few moments?’

“ There was a strained, hollow sound in his voice, that gave me a shiver. I went and stood by him wonderingly. Was he going to be ill?

“ He twined his arms about my neck, drawing me down beside him, and kissed me with a strange solemnity.

“ ‘ Rose, how much do you love me?’

“ It is curious how the pathetic and the ridiculous things in life jostle one another. I could have quoted Shakespeare with a laugh: ‘ There’s beggary in love that can be reckoned.’

“ ‘ Rose, my darling, is it enough to help you bear a great misfortune?’

“ ‘ What?’ I asked in surprise.

“ ‘ You have a right to know first. It would be cowardly to allow you to hear it from other lips.’

“ ‘ But what is it?’ I asked impatiently. Then I looked into the heavy, weary eyes, noted the tortured brow, the quivering lips, felt the shivering pulsation. ‘ Oh!’ I cried in dismay, ‘ you *are* going to be ill.’

“ ‘ I hope not. It would come very inopportunistically;’ and he gave a dreary smile.

“ ‘ There can be nothing worse than baby’s’ —

“ ‘ Ah! I can never make up to you for that, can I, Rose? *Is* the child all to the mother? And now another burthen. My poor little darling, I sometimes wish’ —

“ I did not hear the last part of the sentence; for the first part pierced me to the quick. There was a time, before baby came, when we had been perfectly happy. How had I drifted so away? How had I come to think — what did I think? What blackness of darkness was between Stephen and me? What great gulf? Where had gone the gladness of youth, of love, of the hundred little secret springs of joy between us? For surely I loved him. I had not wandered there!

“ ‘ O Stephen!’ I cried with a great gasp of agony, ‘ what has happened? Why am I so far away from you,

—out in darkness, and shivering with cold? Take me back into your large, warm heart!’

“I forced myself into his arms; I kissed his cold lips; I clung to him as if I had been in some imminent peril; for it seemed as if I had stood on the verge of a yawning abyss.

“‘Oh, my little darling, I am so glad to take you back!’ and there was that heavenly satisfaction in his voice, that comes when one has been among the deep things of the soul.

“‘What was it?’ I went on bewildered. ‘Did I love baby too much?’ And then my own heart answered me, ‘Not the love, no one ever yet loved equal to Him who gave “his only-begotten Son,” but the passion of grief. I saw it all now. God had left me to be Stephen’s wife, and I had almost spurned the blessing.

“I slipped out of his arms, and knelt before him, laid my head on his knee like a child, and prayed for myself, for us both.

“‘My dear child, don’t; don’t blame yourself so. Perhaps the fault was mine. You seemed so sacred in your grief. O Rose, how can I ever tell you! It makes it so much the harder;’ and now I felt his tears on my forehead.

“‘Stephen,’ I said, awed and frightened, ‘is it any crime, any sin? Even then I shall not leave you. There is no baby to stand between. I am all, all yours.’

“‘Crime!’” He rose then; and I laughed in my joy, knowing him to be innocent. ‘No, my darling! Please God, you shall never suffer for any positive fault of mine. I do not know that it is even negligence, except in one respect. But my wealth is all swept away. I must pay my debts, and begin anew. I did mean, after I bought the entire right in this house, to settle it upon you. I could have done it when we first came home; but it did not seem quite honest, when I knew the firm was in a

critical state. There have been heavy losses in Chicago and abroad' —

“‘Is that all?’ I was brave little Rose Endicott again. ‘Why, Stephen, I shall not mind being poor. I never was rich, you know, until you took me; and, if I can comfort you’ —

“I fell into his arms again, weeping; not for any sorrow, not for any lost wealth, but rather, I think, from joy, because the mists had cleared away between us.

“We talked it over at length; and I decided, with him, that it would be best to give up every thing. It would be like rending my heart to go out of the house; for here I had known and loved baby, and here he had died. Yet even that might be best. I should realize how surely then I had only Stephen.

“I lay awake much of the night, thinking; not in any nervous or fretted state, or even despondency, but trying to undo the tangle, and learn how I had drifted so far away from Stephen. There was much to humiliate me. I had held my sorrow as the greatest. I had refused to be comforted. True, it had not been a noisy or aggressive grief. I had asked nothing; and I had also declined to take any thing, except from — how strange! — Brother Louis. He had known just how to minister to me. I had gone to church, to all the services, been outwardly patient, mild, resigned; and yet now I saw I had hardly been to God at all. It meant something more than to stand and grope about, and hug myself in the soft, fragrant darkness, where I could cry unnoticed. It meant that I should be believing for myself and for Stephen. It meant, too, that I should be thankful for the little life taken before it had been marred, or stained, or defaced by the world's ways. It was so pure and beautiful; and God was holding it safe in heaven for Stephen and me, when we came.

“‘Show me the way,’ I prayed softly, ‘and I will

walk therein;’ not in any path of my own devising, not shrinking, and shut away from my fellow-creatures, not bending all things to minister to my selfish sorrow, but gladly, joyfully, as befits one who has laid up treasure in heaven.

“I rose in the morning when Stephen did. I brushed out my hair, and curled it over my fingers, laying away the great braid from the hair-dresser’s. Then I tied a pale blue ribbon in it, and put on my blue cashmere morning-dress. Stephen came and kissed me wonderingly, without any comment, however. I was adorning for him, just as I had in the first happy year of my marriage. We went down to breakfast. Louis sat by the window, reading.

“It did not flash upon me all at once, rather it came after long and confused thought, wherein I separated bit by bit, and placed each just where it belonged, looked at my mistake incredulously at first, and then with great shame and remorse. I had been putting another in Stephen’s stead.

“‘Louis,’ my husband said when he rose from the table, ‘will you come down to the store this morning? There are some complications in which you may be a little concerned. At all events, I want your advice, your’—

“‘It is nothing worse, Stephen?’

“‘I think it has reached the worst,’ he answered almost cheerfully.

“‘I will be down in about an hour.’

“I did not go out to prayers with him that morning. I thought of the children of Israel in the halting journey through the wilderness, when both Moses and Aaron had prayed, and worked wonders, and asked the Lord for guidance. What had he said? ‘Not sacrifice and burnt-offering.’ His word had been clear: ‘Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward.’ I had just to go forward.

"I went to my bureau after breakfast, and took out baby's clothes, gathered his playthings and some little gifts, and folded them all away in a box, which I locked. I did not do it without many tears; but I kept brave to the very end. Then I sat down again, and thought.

"Without meaning any thing wrong, without even a shadow of evil, I had gone out of the right path. I had allowed Stephen to stand aside, while I walked with another in what I said were heavenly ways. A strange, secret perception of things: it could never have been love; for I was too true to Stephen, loved him too well, and I would have cut off my right hand, and plucked out my right eye, sooner than think such a thing of Louis. It had been a high and fine sympathy, engendered by community of tastes and interest, and indulgence in my great sorrow. But I saw, with a little more, how easily even a good woman might drift into dangerous paths, when there was no truly noble, large-hearted, and brave husband for her to compare her friend with. And I say now, that no earthly thing — child, sympathy, or friend — has a right to come between husband and wife. When these two have chosen one another from all the world; when their souls have been filled with that large awaiting of sacred, persistent tenderness, which can discern the face of God, and not be ashamed; when they have come to the heart-truth and understanding that this life and love is the beginning and foundation of the life to come, that it touches reverently the great secrets of eternity, — they have only to go on. World wisdom and analysis, far-fetched impulses, tortured questionings, and catching at outside things, are not for them; neither do they want any adviser between them. God has made them one, and woe to the husband or wife who first begins to put the bond asunder, even from a secret consciousness of some higher and finer growth.

"I do not wonder that both ideals and idols are made

of clergymen. We think of them as living nearer to God ; of having a purer and finer conception ; of so standing in the glory, that, under their shadow, we may catch some reflected ray ; that they are as pure and strong in their moral power as they are keen in their moral sense ; and with them is a certain blind, unquestioning safety. Yet this adoration brought forth its bitter fruit centuries ago, when mysticism flourished, and, in the end, blackened like a poisonous fungus-growth. Wisely did the Psalmist say, —

“ *But no man may deliver his brother, or make an agreement unto God for him.*

“ *For it costs more to redeem their souls ; so that he must let that alone forever.*’

“ We may believe ourselves strong ; but, until the sure test is applied, how can we tell ? Sometimes it merely passes us by with a dazzling, bewildering flash : at others, it comes near, touches like a galvanic shock the susceptible spot, quivers around the hidden unsoundness like lightning-play : haply for us that we are not scorched and blackened irremediably.

“ I could not think of all these things deliberately then. I only saw my mistake, and retraced my steps humbly. It was enough that Stephen needed me : so I arose and washed myself, and laid off my sackcloth ; for it was well with the child. God had that in his keeping.

“ They were some time in going through all the business complications. It was the worst that Stephen had feared ; but there would be enough to pay the debts. If only the house —

“ ‘ Stephen,’ I said one day, ‘ do you suppose that I would keep it, if it had been settled upon me, while you owed one dollar ? It will be very hard to go away ’ (and I had much ado to keep the tears out of my voice) ; ‘ but I want you to keep your good name unstained. I have planned how we shall have a few rooms, and

I will do my own work. Let all the rest go. We have one another.'

"I had brought him a little key to put on his ring, and keep until I asked him for it. It belonged to the box that held baby's earthly treasures, and was the token, though he knew it not until afterward, that I gave even that sacred grief to his care.

"Bessie came to stay with Mrs. Mallory while Eugene went South; and they were both so good to us! She treated the boys like sons, and gave us many pleasures, which she asked as favors to herself. She was such a rare, bright, large-hearted woman, with just a touch of piquant sharpness, a spicy flavoring to her nature, that kept it sweet and wholesome. Bessie suited her so exactly. It is so delightful in this world to meet with these elected relationships that are agreeable in every respect.

"The business went on to a conclusion. The house was quietly sold, transferred to the creditors, and disposed of. It gave us both a great pang when it was fairly done, though we were to keep possession until May.

"We sat together one evening, Stephen and I, when Louis entered the room. There had come to be a slight difference between us; and yet, somehow, I loved him better. His face had a pure, transfigured look to me; and he had taken up a fashion of placing Stephen and I always together. I had never allowed my own revelation to wander out of my own soul, but gave it into the hands of God, who had seen on all sides, to judge. There I left it content, and just accepted his promises.

"Louis came in, as I have said. I had been sewing, and Stephen reading; but we had left off again to talk. There was a little space between our chairs; and he filled it, dropping something, a folded paper, into my lap, and laying his hand on Stephen's shoulder.

"'I want you to look over this with Rose,' he said

clearly. 'It is my gift to you both; but I put it in her name, and that of her children, so that there need never be a question, in any future contingency, about a transfer. There would never be any place quite as dear to you both as this: there is no place so dear to me. I shall always remember how she persuaded me to come; how you took me in; and how, with God's help, I began a new life in this very house. I could not see it go into a stranger's hands. I should like, if it pleased you both, to have my home here with you. I have some money left, which, with my salary, will quite suffice for my wants. I do not think I shall ever marry (not that I make any rash vows on the subject); but, if I do, it will be many years hence.'

"Through this speech, Stephen had been unfolding the paper. Our eyes caught one sentence at the same moment, — 'To Rose Endicott Duncan and her children, their heirs and assigns, forever.'

"Stephen rose, and put his arms about his brother's neck. The silence was better than any words. Then he reached out for me, and brought me into the circle, as if, thereby, he gave Louis a brother's right to me, and me a sister's interest in him.

"We went to talking, at length, in that broken, tearful fashion that people always fall into when their souls have been deeply moved. If we could have asked one thing out of the wreck, it would have been the power to keep this. I think Stephen had felt somewhat hurt at Stuart's eagerness to be assured that he was all safe. He was engaged to an heiress, and life lay smiling and prosperous before him; but there would always be a strand of half-fascinating selfishness in him. Some friends had already proffered Stephen assistance; but Stuart, out of his abundance, had not held forward even a hint of promise. And Louis would never be making money to lay up for the future. It was doubly generous in him.

“ ‘O Stephen!’ I said with a glad cry when we were alone, ‘he is next to papa in every good word and work. Papa could never have been more nobly generous.’

“ ‘It is the grace come back again, my little Rose, the ‘bread returned,’ that you cast on the troubled waters of his boyhood. What could either of us have done without you?’”

“ ‘It is so good to know that you are glad to have me!’

“ ‘Glad!’ and he folded me to his heart. ‘Can I fill up the one lonely space, Rose?’

“ ‘O Stephen, you do, you do!’ and I spoke the sweet, solemn truth.”

[What she did not know, what neither of them were to know, until they stood around the great white throne, was the warfare Louis Duncan had been fighting out like a good soldier. The unspoken but perceptible change in Rose puzzled him at first. He had come to look upon her as little less than a saint. To his mind she was purity, devotion, self-abnegation, holiness, she who could be another St. Elizabeth of Hungary if occasion required. He liked to see her in her simple white dresses, with a black chain and cross about her neck, and that expression of rapt devotion in her eyes.

But what had come over her now? Was she going back to the vanities of the world in this season of loss and sorrow? Was she turning from the only stronghold to poor human love? He studied her in amazement: he felt hurt, neglected. Stephen was always with her now, Stephen —

Something rose in his heart, stirred it, made it conscious of a longing and a tenderness, a pain, a dreary looking-forward. What was it? Surely he was not envious of their happiness?

It was an awful knowledge that has overtaken both men and women before, — good, honest, noble hearts. If she were Rose Endicott to-day, and he —

He plucked it out, and trod it under foot, — the sweetest part of a man's life, when it does not lead into forbidden paths. He was no weak, sentimental hero. If he could not conquer himself, he had no right to stay and glance at her even. If he coveted one look, one word, one smile, to have and to hold in his secret heart, it was a sin. He could not help being a man, and seeing what might have been possible to life; but he rose to thrust it away before it could take root. He would not stain and mar his own soul, — hers was safe in her husband's love, — he gave thanks for that now. This thing had been deeded to another by God's gift in the beginning; let him keep that clearly before his eyes.

He went out to the fields of his labor, taking the most unpromising to-day. Here, in these miserable dens, were men and women who had been born with clean souls, but who had overlaid them with selfish desires and indulgence; who had yielded, little by little; who had often known the right, but closed their eyes upon it. If heaven is not reached by a single bound, no more are such depths of infamy and sin. But he pitied them with a profound and tender charity: he stretched out one hand, while, with the other, he held the angel by the thigh, like the wrestler of old, and prayed his prayer: "I will not let thee go, unless thou bless me."

He returned home at night tired, but content. He saw them smile upon one another while he kept quite outside. It was their blessed, God-given right.

Afterward the plan concerning the house entered his mind. His staying should be as they elected. He surely could tell by word or sign. He would not take himself out of their presence from any weakness or cowardice, remembering the bidding of the grand old apostle: "Having done all things, to stand."]

“It was so delightful to think of going on unchanged! Stephen had some very good business-friends, who found an opening for him. I sent away one of the servants, and became a regular little housekeeper myself. I think Stephen and I had never been so happy.

“I began to understand presently, that a new feeling had sprung up between Louis and ourselves. I wondered whether it was because he had given us the house, that he was so careful of assuming any kind of right. He put Stephen in the place of elder brother, and paid him an indescribable deference. They were so dear to each other! There is always an exquisite charm about the friendships of men, and particularly that of brothers, which is much rarer in this world than it should be.

“Indeed, it seemed as if good times were beginning with us again. First there came the tidings of Nelly's baby. They all said Dr. Kinnard was overjoyed. I do think a bit of the best fortune to her had been Aunt Adelaide's marriage: it gave her the undisputed possession of her house and of the children, in a greater degree than before.

“Then Bessie's marriage took place. It had been such a lovely, romantic kind of an engagement! — every thing happening just right, and Mrs. Mallory setting at defiance the traditional mother-in-law. She would always be with them; but we could see that Bessie would not have the ghost of a chance for complaint.

“They expected to remain abroad several years. The choice belongings were packed and stored, the house rented, the horses sold; yet it was a very bright parting: I don't know why, except that Mrs. Mallory would not let any one be sad.

“‘I wonder, little wife, if we shall ever go to Europe,’ Stephen said afterward, with something like a sigh.

“‘I don't care a bit,’ I made answer lightly. ‘I have resolved to think that whatever God sends is the very best.’

“He smiled, and pinched my cheek. It was getting quite round and rosy again.

“The next was a Heaven-sent blessing to fill baby’s place. I took it with a great throb of thankful love. And yet he was so different from Stevie; not nearly so handsome, with brown-red curly hair, like mine, and blue eyes, but the best, merriest, frolicking baby in the whole world, when he grew large enough to enjoy such things.

“Louis was exceedingly delighted. What a brave worker he was in the Master’s vineyard! The world was full of wide meaning and rich promises for him. Instead of disdaining it, and sighing for heaven, he tried to make it the better, even for one clean soul rescued from the depths. There was in him a large steadfastness and truth, that seemed to lift every-day work above any mere drudgery. Like, and yet unlike, papa, yet living in the same accord, feeling the continual presence, the shaping and placing of some wiser hand, the going-forth in continual gladness, and sowing by the wayside, knowing full well that he should reap, if he fainted not.

“Oddly enough, there came to us presently the news of Daisy’s engagement. It had been a pet plan all along of Dr. Kinnard’s, it seemed. There was to be a rectory built at Edgerly (they had finished a very nice church), and then Daisy was to go in bridal robes, and be its keeper.

“That spring I was not so well, — ‘run-down,’ as people say. Stephen was a good deal alarmed, and asked Dr. Kinnard to come in and see me. It ended by my being sent to Edgerly for the summer.

“Daisy was married the first of June, and came home a fortnight afterward to take possession of her new house. She was such a sweet, sensible, unaffected body; and then her experience in parish-work stood her in good stead. Mr. Dudley was very fond of her; not foolishly so, but with a grave, reverent tenderness good to see.

“ I think it is best that people should occasionally go out of their own narrow bounds, and study the lives of others. I began to take a great interest in Nelly's. She had grown more like mamma than any of us, and had that sweet, pleasant wisdom, that large awaiting and hopeful outlook. She kept up with her husband; and he was a strongly intellectual man, rather severe on shams, and ‘isms’ that would not bear clear winnowing, but not an unfair opponent. They had gathered around them a charming and cultured circle; but she was as entertaining to some of the doctor's poor patients, who came in with wan, sickly babies, and wanted comforting, as if they were chosen friends. I told her, one day, that she would be a powerful rival to Daisy.

“ She had managed to gain over her young step-son, who adored her, and grandmother, who was a really pleasant old lady, thinking ‘my son's wife’ could not possibly be mistaken on any point. I knew she had worked hard for these two victories.

“ Then Miss Maud came home from school, bringing a friend with her. This was the first time Nelly had really taken her under her care. I used to watch her wise way of planning and working. She made it so pleasant for the two girls, offering them her pony-carriage, asking other young people in to tea, arranging some parties to the woods, and, somehow, being in the midst of all with her beautiful, animated face, and her inspiring voice. It was odd to take note of Maud as well. She seemed so afraid of yielding to her stepmother's influence, and regarded her with a kind of distrustful jealousy that was often overpowered by Nelly's pure goodness. Sometimes the doctor would be quite vexed. I used to smile at the manner in which Nelly restrained him. Once, indeed, he appealed to me to know if I did not consider him hen-pecked. It was so ridiculous, that we all laughed.

“ After her friend went away, Maud's aunt sent for her.

I think she did not really care to go ; but no one made any demur. She only remained a fortnight, however ; and, after she returned, we all remarked a little change in her. She began to pay Nelly a pleasant respect. She so seldom gave her any name in speaking to her, and seemed to delight in having different tastes and desires ; but now she deferred to her occasionally, and appeared really glad when circumstances compelled her to adopt her stepmother's way of thinking. Altogether, I thought her much improved.

“ The day before she returned to school, she was up in Nelly's room a long while. I noticed, when she came to supper, that she had been crying ; but she was so unusually gracious, that I knew nothing had gone wrong.

“ That night, of her own accord, she came and kissed Nelly as she was going to bed.

“ When she was quite up stairs, Nelly rose, crossed over to her husband, and, putting her arms around his neck, said in a tone of deep emotion, —

“ ‘ Barton, congratulate me. I have won my kingdom at length. I have entered in, and taken possession.’

“ ‘ My darling ! ’

“ If she could be such a mother to another woman's children, what would she not be to her own !

“ They sent me home well and rosy. I began to have some doubt as to whether I had the *very best* husband in the family, when there were two such men as Dr. Kinnard and Mr. Dudley.

“ But he was the best to me.”

“ Five years after Bessie's marriage, we all met at the rectory to welcome her home, though now it was golden, glowing September. The dear old house overflowed, not only with children and grandchildren, but talk and

laughter. Papa's hair was quite silvery, and his gentle, absent-minded ways were so sweet; and mamma was a grandmother out of a story-book. Fan was stout and rosy. Winthrop had been elected a member of Congress; and they were getting to be quite grand people. Babies grew and multiplied: there were five now. No want or trouble seemed to come near there. Mr. Churchill was quite ailing now and then; but Miss Esther would be stately and elegant to the last.

"I suppose I ought to bring myself in next. We were prospering, though not back to the old point. And yet we care little for that. The serenity of our souls is not disturbed about money. There are a few silvery threads finding their way about Stephen's temples; but he smiles over them, while his eyes still keep their kindly, half-shady light. We have a wonderful little girl, who is quite the family beauty. She makes us think of *him* hourly; and we talk about him now with a tender sweetness that leaves no pain.

"Nelly eclipses us all, I think. She always was tall and elegant; but now she seems rounded out to the perfection of symmetry, and adorned with the perfection of coloring. The years have crowned her with their richness; and her own motherhood glorifies her hardly less than that she accepted at her marriage. It has brought its own reward. She is so lovely with this grown son and daughter; she makes so much of every grace and tenderness, that they unconsciously emulate her. Eagerly people talk of them as being such a happy family; and it is true enough. If Dr. Kinnard's summer was late, it is none the less glowing. Beside Frances, he has twin-boys, pretty as pictures.

"There is Daisy and her husband, and a little daughter Daisy, whose sweetness of mind and soul shines out, and makes her beautiful with the something that always puzzles people. And there is radiant Bess, Queenie

always now, bright, dazzling, stylish from the crown of her head to her dainty foot, with her rippling, rapid talk, her laughs of saucy, suggestive music, her piquant ways, oddly like her handsome, pink-cheeked mother-in-law. They have left one little girl asleep in a graveyard at Florence: they have another with them, and Grandmother Mallory is rarely seen without it. Eugene says he and Queenie have leave to go their ways now.

“ There are two more fair girls, Gertrude, and Edith, for whom Stephen stood so long ago, and who love him dearly. We sit out on the porch and on the grass, and talk all these times over, from the beginning, — our romances, that will presently be our children's, the world goes on so fast. The twilight falls, and finds us there. Then papa leans softly over to the wife of his youth, the woman who has marked her plain, daily path with jewels, that the Lord will claim for his in that other country. And he says slowly, tenderly clasping her fingers in his,—

“ ‘ Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates.’ ”

